Adrian Wallwork

ENGLISH

for Presentations at International Conferences

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English for Presentations at International Conferences

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Springer

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Preface

Who Is This Book for?

This book is a guide to writing and giving presentations. It is mainly intended for non-native speakers of English of all disciplines who want to present the results of their research at international conferences. Problems with language (both written and oral) are dealt with extensively, whereas the technical/graphical elements of creating slides are given less space.

The book is designed to help both those who have never done presentations before and researchers whose English is already good (or who are native speakers) but who want to improve their presentation skills. Some chapters have "Advanced Tips" for more experienced presenters.

I hope that other trainers like myself in English for Academic Purposes will also find the book a source of useful ideas to pass on to students.

Note: Most of the examples given are from real presentations, but in some cases they are fictitious and may contain invented statistics.

What Will I Learn from This Book?

This book will help you to

- overcome problems with nerves and embarrassment
- prepare and practice a well-organized, interesting presentation
- highlight the essential points you want the audience to remember
- avoid problems in English by using short easy-to-say sentences
- attract and retain audience attention
- decide what to say at each stage of the presentation
- improve your pronunciation
- learn useful phrases
- deal with questions from the audience
- gain confidence and give a memorable presentation

How Should I Read This Book?

This book is designed to be like a manual or a user guide—you don't need to read it starting from page 1. Like a manual it has lots of short subsections and is divided into short paragraphs with many bullet points. This is to help you find what you want quickly and also to assimilate the information as rapidly and as effectively as possible.

You can use the Table of Contents as a checklist of things to remember.

If you have never done a presentation before, then you should start by reading the rest of this chapter. If you have done presentations before, but have problems with pronunciation or still suffer from nerves, then you could start at Chapters 3 and 4, respectively. Are you not so good at planning and practicing? Then read all of Part I. If you tend to write too much text in your slides or have difficulty explaining them, then read Part II. Finally, if you want to know what to say at each stage of a presentation then go directly to Part III.

You may find that occasionally the same concept is explained more than once but in different sections. This is because the book is not designed to be read from cover to cover, and some concepts apply to more than one area of preparing and delivering a presentation.

Other Books in This Series

This book is a part of a series of books to help non-native English-speaking researchers to communicate in English. The other titles are

English for Writing Research Papers
English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing
English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar

Why Do a Presentation at a Conference?

By giving a presentation at a conference, you can gain visibility and inform others of the results you have achieved. This may enable you to increase your chances of getting feedback on your work, establishing new contacts, collaborating with other research groups, and maybe of even getting more funds so that you can carry out better research.

A presentation is an opportunity to talk about factors that you probably wouldn't mention in your paper, e.g., ideas and conjectures, negative results, unfinished work—all of these might stimulate useful questions and feedback from the audience.

You will also be able to exploit the review process that takes place before the conference, and of course you can include the presentation you have made in your CV, in applications for grants, and in grant progress reports.

Isn't Just Attending a Conference Enough, Why Is It a Good Thing to Give a Presentation?

All the networking benefits are considerably improved if you have given a presentation. You will find that people will come up to you after the presentation and ask for more details or even suggest collaborations—this means that the effort to make face-to-face contact is principally made by them not you. In any case, if you have gained visibility through a presentation, then you will find it much easier to introduce yourself to other people and begin a conversation.

What Kind of Presentations Do Audiences Like to See?

We tend to like presentations that

- are professional and are delivered by someone who is credible and confident
- look like they were prepared specifically for us and make it immediately clear why we should be interested
- have clear slides, with minimal detail and helpful and/or entertaining images
- tell us interesting, curious, and counterintuitive things
- don't make us work too hard to follow what is being said—two or three main points, lots of examples, and not too much theory
- are delivered in a friendly, enthusiastic, and relatively informal way
- entertain us and interact with us

What Constitutes a Professional Presentation?

A "professional" presentation is one where you put the audience first. You think about how the audience would most like to receive the information you are giving.

The key to an effective presentation is that you have a few main points that you want the audience to remember and that you highlight these points during the presentation in an interesting, and if possible, enthusiastic way.

The important thing is to be relaxed. To become more relaxed, the key is to prepare well and concentrate on the content, not on your English. Your presentation is not an English examination—your English does not have to be perfect. Be realistic and don't aim for 100% accuracy, otherwise you will be more worried about your English than about communicating the value of your research.

What Kind of Presentations Do Audiences NOT Like to See?

We tend NOT to like presentations where the speaker

- has clearly not practiced the presentation
- has no clear introduction, a confused structure, and no conclusions
- appears to be talking to himself/herself rather than engaging with the audience
- reads the slides
- has a series of similar slides full of text and diagrams
- relies on animations
- fails to address the audience's interest and only sees things from his/her point of view
- is too technical, too detailed
- speaks too fast, speaks with a monotone, speaks for too long
- shows little interest in his/her topic

What About Posters?

A poster is a good alternative to a presentation, particularly if you feel worried about standing up in front of a large audience or if your English is very low level. This book does not cover posters specifically. However you will find useful writing rules in Chapter 2, pronunciation rules in Chapter 3, suggestions on how to answer questions in Chapter 16, and useful phrases in Chapter 17. Links to websites on the design and layout of posters can be found in "Links and References."

> For suggestions on how to write in a concise and readable way see the companion volume: English for Writing Research Papers

Pisa, Italy Adrian Wallwork

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Part I
Preparation and Practice

Ninety per cent or more of preparation is typically devoted to content. Countless hours go into creating and fine-tuning the presentation materials, and whatever time there is left over—if there is any time left over—is reserved for practice. Yet how you practice can literally make or break your presentation. Keep in mind that a lot of presentations die on the vine [i.e. are not effective at all] *because they aren't rehearsed properly, or they're never rehearsed at all.*

Jeffrey Jacobi

Chapter 1
Ten Stages in Preparing Your Slides

You will learn how to

- plan your preparation
- begin your preparation by focusing on what you want to say rather than immediately creating the slides

Why is this important?

If you don't rehearse (i.e., practice) it is very unlikely that you will give a good presentation and you will thus waste a perfect opportunity for promoting your research and for setting up collaborations.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
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Below are 10 stages in preparing a presentation that you can follow.

Note that there are seven stages before you create your slides. It is generally best to first decide what to say, and then use that as a basis for creating your slides. Often, people who begin by preparing the slides

- find that they spend so much time on the slides that they don't have time to practice. But the success of your presentation very much depends on how much you prepare and practice
- don't think about what it is that they really want to say, so their slides then dictate what they will tell the audience. It is a much better strategy if your slides reflect and support what you want to say
- create some slides that they subsequently find are not needed, and thus waste valuable preparation time

Realistically, you may not have time to do all the stages suggested below, but try to

- focus on only transmitting three key points (see Section 1.2)
- think about your structure by answering the questions in Section 1.5
- minimize the number of slides and the amount of text on those slides
- write down your beginning and ending. Practice them as much as you can (on the plane, in the bath, wherever)
- learn the correct pronunciation of key words

1.1 Find out about the potential audience

It is very useful to find out how much the audience already know about your topic. If you are too technical you may alienate those who are potentially interested in the topic but are not experts. However, if you are too general you will bore the experts.

Here are some ways to find out about the audience:

1. If the conference is organized so that attendees sign up in advance for the talks they are going to attend, then you should be able to ask the organizers to give you a list of probable attendees at your talk. Go through this list carefully. You can Google them and also see if there are any names of people who have appeared in any bibliographies of your own or similar papers—this will help you to see how many experts there are.
2. The list of attendees to your talk may also help you to understand what nationality they are. If there are a lot of native English speakers, then at the question and answer session you might need to explain that you are not a native speaker yourself and ask them to speak slowly and clearly. Similarly, if there is a disproportionate number of non-native speakers, then you may need to talk more slowly.

3. Look at the titles of the other talks. This should give you an indication of what the audience may be interested in.
4. If your talk is late in the schedule, go to as many of the earlier talks as possible to judge the possible level of the audience's interest in your topic. Then you can make a few adjustments to make it more, or less, technical as appropriate.

You are likely to have a mixed audience, so don't make too many assumptions about what they may and may not know (unless you managed to understand this by doing point 4 above). You thus need to find the right balance and prepare extra slides that you can use to tailor your presentation to the specific audience.

1.2 Identify your key points/messages

Write down what you think are the most important/interesting aspects of your research that you want to communicate to your audience.

Try to limit the number of your important points (hereafter, key points) to about three or four, as this is the number that experts have proved is what most audiences can realistically remember. By not trying to cover everything but limiting yourself just to certain aspects, your presentation will have a clear focus. This does not mean that you only mention these key points and nothing else. Instead, it means that you mention them in your introduction and in your conclusions, and you give them the most space while describing your methodology and/or your results.

This process is a little similar to writing an abstract for a paper, which acts as both a summary and an advertisement of your work. It may help you to think that there might be journal editors and reviewers in the audience and that your objective is to give them the highlights of your research so that they will be interested in publishing your work in a video version of their journal.

Your key points should generally indicate what makes your research stand out (i.e., why your community should be interested) and how it contributes to knowledge in your field. The key points could be, for example,

- what problem you wanted to resolve/investigate and why this was important for the scientific community
- how you did it (your methodology)
- what success you had (your results)

Alternatively, perhaps the problem you wanted to solve is well known (and thus doesn't merit much description), but your methodology is highly innovative. In this case your three main points may be connected with how your method works, or how you selected your data.

Or maybe your methodology is not important, but your results are. Thus your three important points could simply be your three most important findings, or your one important finding has three important implications.

1.3 Prepare a two-minute talk

If you try and condense your presentation down to a two-minute coverage of your three main points, this will make you understand what is, and is not, absolutely essential. So, imagine you are about to give your presentation at an important international conference. You have the last slot of the last day. The person before you talked for more than their allocated time. Finally it is your turn to present. The conference chairperson says to you "*I am really sorry but we have run out of time, I can only give you two minutes to explain your research to this very important audience.*" What would you say in those two minutes?

Write some notes for your two-minute presentation. Preferably think and write in English. Try to use short simple sentences. Imagine you are going to speak to a group of friends rather than researchers. Using simple constructions and sentences will help you to focus on what you want to say. It will also enable you to express the concepts in the clearest way, which will be the easiest way for the audience to understand.

A presentation is not an oral version of your paper. It is an oral version of the most interesting and significant highlights of the research that led to your paper. This means you do not need to include everything that you covered in your paper. In fact it is a good idea not to use your paper as a starting point.

1.4 Record and transcribe your two minutes

Record yourself speaking (in English) about your three main points and make sure you don't go over two minutes. Imagine that you are chatting to a friend.

1.5 Expand into a longer presentation

Transcribe your recording, and then think how and where you need to expand what you have said—but always focus on explaining not more than three key points. Either write down exactly what you want to say or simply write some notes.

Creating a written speech is the best option, but it obviously takes longer.

See Chapter 2 Writing out your speech in English

A good and easy structure to follow is to imagine that you are telling a story.

The title of your presentation is the title (summary) of your story. You then structure your presentation around your three most important points. It might help you to organize what you want to say if you include short answers to the following questions:

a) Why did I choose this topic in general? Why am I enthusiastic about it? What can I tell the audience that they probably don't know but that they will find interesting? How can I make it interesting to those attendees who are not experts in this field?
b) What motivated me to decide to test a particular hypothesis or investigate a particular aspect? Was I stimulated by someone else's research?
c) What did I do to test the hypothesis/aspect (i.e., a description of your methodology)? What problems did I have during the design and testing phases (these problems may be even more interesting to the audience than the successes, so think about the strengths and weaknesses of your approach)
d) What did I find? And what did I *not* find? Did my findings confirm my initial hypothesis? Were there any inconsistencies or surprises?
e) What is the significance of my work in the big picture of my field of interest? How and where can my findings be applied?
f) What questions do I still have? What am I planning to do next? (Plus a reminder to the audience of most important results so far)

Think of your presentation as the headlines in a newspaper. Let the audience read the details in your manuscript or on your website. The true test of whether something in your presentation should really be there is to think about what would happen if you removed it. Would the audience even notice? Or would the presentation fail as a result?

1.6 Practice with colleagues

Using your script or notes that you created in Section 1.5, ask colleagues, friends, or family members to listen to you. When you have finished, get them to write down questions to ask you. Do this with a variety of people. If you think the answers to their questions are fundamental, then incorporate answers to them into your speech. If they are not fundamental, keep a note of them and think how you might answer them in a Q&A session at the end of your presentation.

See Chapter 16 Questions and Answers

1.7 Give your presentation a structure

The next step is to divide your speech/notes into sections. The sections might be Introduction (questions a and b from Section 1.5), Methodology (c), Results (d), Discussion (e), and Conclusions (f). Think about what your specific intention is for each part of the presentation and think about where and how you can focus on your

key points. If you have no particular intention this will be immediately transparent to the audience.

The way we receive and absorb information in an oral presentation is very different from how we get it by reading a paper. When we read, we control how fast and in what order we want to absorb information. We can scan the whole paper quickly if we wish, and we can skip certain parts. If a written paper is well organized, we are guided by the section headings and paragraphs and we can see how the points fit together.

While watching a presentation, we have no control over what or how or in what order the presenter will give us this information. We cannot go backwards to "reread" if we didn't understand the first time.

So in your preparation, everything you do should be oriented to making what you say easily and immediately understandable to the audience—they only have one chance to hear you. This is achieved through a clear structure, clear slides, and easy-to-follow explanations.

1.8 Create the slides

At this stage you will be reasonably familiar with the content of your presentation, so now you can decide what slides are really needed. Every slide should have a purpose and its purpose must be clear not just to you but also to the audience. A slide is needed when it does one or more of the following:

- makes an explanation less complicated and quicker
- helps people to visualize and recall something better
- makes something abstract become more concrete
- attracts attention or entertains the audience (but only in a way that is relevant to your topic)

If a potential slide does not do any of the above, then you probably do not need to create it. You do not need a slide for every point you make. Some points you can simply tell the audience or alternatively write them on the whiteboard.

See Part II What to write and show on the slides

1.9 Modify your script

You have now created your slides. The next stage is to modify your script so that it takes into account exactly what you will say about each slide.

Try to keep the colloquial style in your speech. It will be much easier for you to talk during your presentation if you talk as you normally do in everyday life. It will be natural for you and will sound natural to the audience. You do not need to adopt a specific "presentation voice." So ask yourself "*Is this something that a normal person would say in a normal conversation?*" If it isn't, change it.

See Part III What to do and say at each stage of the presentation

1.10 Cut redundant slides, simplify complicated slides

Practice your presentation with colleagues. Ask them what slides you could cut and which slides they found complicated to understand.

You could ask them to classify each point in your presentation as follows:

A: absolutely essential
B: important
C: include only if time permits

See Chapter 4 Practice and learning from other people's presentations

Your aim is to focus only on what the audience want/need to hear so you don't need to include things simply because you think you SHOULD include them; for example, because you think it is more professional to cover everything or because you think by putting them in you will make a good impression on your boss.

By this stage you should be very familiar with the content of your presentation. Now you need to focus on the language and pronunciation.

See Chapter 2 Writing out your speech in English and Chapter 3 Pronunciation and intonation

Chapter 2
Writing Out Your Speech in English

You will learn how to

- be concise and clear, and avoid improvising
- decide what style of language to use
- assess when your use of English is and is not crucial
- use appropriate vocabulary and grammar
- identify which tenses to use at various stages of the presentation

Why is this important?

At least 20% of the words and phrases that inexperienced presenters use tend to be redundant, i.e., they give no information that is useful for the audience. That's 20% less time for explaining and emphasizing the key points. Also, using the right style (personal rather than impersonal) will considerably increase the impact of your presentation.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_2, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

This chapter outlines some ways to improve how you write your script, and thus on how you orally deliver your presentation. If you are a researcher in the arts or humanities, you may have to give a presentation without any slides at all, so this section should help you to decide how to write your speech.

For more on good scientific and technical writing, see the companion volume: English for Writing Research Papers

2.1 Why should I write a speech? I'm giving an oral presentation, not a written one

Obviously you do not need to write down every word you will say; though you may be surprised to learn that a typical ten-minute presentation only requires 1200–1800 words, depending on how fast you speak and how much time the audience need to absorb the slides. This is not much longer than an introduction in a paper.

For the more technical parts of the presentation, when you explain your methodology and results, it may be enough to write notes. This is because these aspects will probably be the easiest for you to talk about, as you will be very familiar with them and will probably have all the correct English terminology that you need.

On the other hand, the beginnings and endings of presentations tend to be less technical and are the places where presenters tend to improvise the most and are thus more prone to making unnecessary repetitions and being less clear. So it is a good idea to write down exactly what you want to say in your introduction and conclusions.

The reasons for writing the script are absolutely NOT for you to then learn every word. Memorizing a script is not a good idea. You will not sound natural when you speak and you might panic if you forget your "lines." However, writing a script is useful for other reasons—to help you to decide

- what the best structure is and thus the best order for your slides
- if certain slides can be cut
- if the audience really needs to know what you plan to say

Once you have written your script, you can then write the slides. The slides themselves will help you to remember what to say, so you can then practice talking about the slides without using your script.

A written script will also help you to

- identify words that you may not be able to pronounce
- check that the sentences are not too long or complex for you to say naturally and for the audience to understand easily
- understand when an example would be useful for the audience

- clarify where you need to make connections between slides
- delete redundancy and unnecessary repetition
- identify the moments in the presentation where audience interest might go down
- check if there are any terms that the audience might not understand
- think of how you could deliver your message in a more powerful or dynamic way
- verify if you are spending too much time on one point and not enough on another
- time how long the presentation will take

In addition, if you write a speech then you can easily email it to an English-speaking colleague to revise or you can even submit it to a professional service (see page 164 for a list of some reputable agencies). Then you can be sure that at least the grammar and vocabulary will be correct.

You can also show your speech to a colleague (without forcing him/her to watch you performing)—this is a quick way to see if your presentation is clear and interesting.

2.2 Use your script to write notes to accompany your slides

Most presentation software allows you to write notes for each slide. On the basis of your script you can write down what you want to say for each slide in note form. You can then print your slides with the accompanying notes and have these next to you when you do the presentation at the conference. It is best to print several slides on one page, then you don't need to keep turning the pages. Having these notes with you will give you confidence, because you know that you can consult them if you forget what to say or forget where you are in your presentation.

Also, you can practice your presentation using these notes.

2.3 Use your speech for future presentations

Having a written speech will also help you in future presentations. The next time you go to a conference you may be able to use exactly the same presentation, so practicing for it will be much easier if you already have a script. After each presentation it is worth going through the script to modify it and improve it in the light of the audience's reaction and questions. You will see where you need to add things and where to cut parts that weren't necessary, that the audience didn't understand, or which you found difficult to explain.

Even if you do a completely different presentation in the future, the way you introduce yourself is likely to be the same, and the rest of your script will give you a structure to work on.

2.4 Only have one idea per sentence and repeat key words

If you are an inexperienced presenter the most important thing is to use the simplest English possible by using short phrases containing words that you find easy to say.

Each sentence should only contain one idea. This makes it easier for you to say and for the audience to understand.

Split up long sentences by deleting relative pronouns (*which, who, that*), and link words and phrases (e.g., *and, also, however, moreover, in addition, it is worth noting*)

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The scenario is a typical wireless network, in which there is a single base station in the middle and subscriber stations around it. We used a simulator in order to understand how the power-saving mechanism influences the performance of the users in addition to calculating what effect it has on the environment. It is also worth noting that, testing can be classified in different ways on the basis of the part of the network being tested and how testing is performed.	The scenario is a typical wireless network. There is a single base station in the middle and subscriber stations around it. We used a simulator to help us understand two factors. First, how the power-saving mechanism influences how users perform. Second, the effect that power saving has on the environment. Another important aspect. [pause] Testing. [pause] Testing can be classified in different ways depending on which part of the network you are testing and on how you are doing the testing.

Notice how in the revised version

- the sentences are much shorter. This gives you natural pauses when you're speaking
- key words have been repeated in the place of pronouns (in the fifth sentence *power saving* instead of *it*). This helps the audience to follow you as they may not remember what *it* (or similarly *they, this, that,* etc.,) refer to
- verbs are used in preference to nouns (fourth sentence: *how users perform* instead of *the performance of the users*)
- emphasis and drama can be created by very short phrases interspersed with pauses (e.g., in the fifth and sixth sentences)
- active forms are used instead of passive forms (final sentence)

2.5 Simplify sentences that are difficult to say

Your aim should be to create sentences that you find easy to say. Writing a script will help you to identify sentences, such as the one in the original version below, that do not come out of your mouth easily or naturally. So, read your script aloud, underline any phrases that are difficult to say, and then try to rewrite them until you find a form that is easy for you.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
In 2010, Kay proved that most people speak at a speed of one hundred and twenty to two hundred words per minute, but that the mind can absorb information at six hundred words per minute.	1) In 2010, Kay proved that most people speak at a speed of *nearly* two hundred words per minute. *However*, the mind can absorb information at six hundred words per minute. 2) In 2010, Kay proved that most people speak at a speed of around two hundred words per minute. However, the mind can absorb information at six hundred words per minute—that is four hundred words more than the speed of speech.

The original text is difficult to say because it contains a lot of numbers plus a repetition of sounds (twenty to two hundred). The first revised version gives an approximate number and splits the sentence into two parts. The second revised version states the same fact in a different way so that the audience will remember it better.

2.6 Do not use synonyms for technical/key words

Never use more than one term to refer to the same key concept. If you do, the audience may think that each word has its own specific meaning and wonder what it is. For example, if the adjective *sustainable* is a key word in your field, then don't find synoynms for it, do not use words such as *manageable, steady,* or *persistent*. Likewise, if you use the term *gender studies* don't suddenly use *feminist studies* to mean the same concept. If there is a difference between gender studies and feminist studies then you should explain it, but if they have an identical meaning then just use one or the other.

2.7 Avoid details/exceptions

If you include too many details the audience will have to hear complex explanations that cover all possible cases, and look at complex tables and graphs.

If you leave out details you will not be considered as superficial or unprofessional provided you introduce what you say with a qualification:

> This is an extremely simplified view of the situation, but it is enough to illustrate that . . .
> In reality this table should also include other factors, but for the sake of simplicity I have just chosen these two key points:
> Broadly speaking, this is . . ..

For more on how to deal with details, see Sections 13.5–13.11

ADVANCED TIPS

2.8 Avoid quasi-technical terms

Compare these two versions. Which one sounds more natural and is possibly easy to understand?

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Engloids are communities gathering scientists of homogeneous thematic areas. They produce and/or consume documents of different types, using different applications and hardware resources.	Engloids are communities of scientists who study the same topic. What happens is that these scientists need to write documents and correspond in English such as in papers, presentations, emails, referees' reports. And to do this they use different applications and hardware resources.

The revised version expresses exactly the same concepts as the original, but in simple English. Avoid quasi-technical terms (e.g., *homogeneous thematic areas*) when you can use something more direct (*who study the same topic*).

The more syllables a word has the more likely you are to mispronounce it: *homogeneous* has five syllables, *same* has only one.

2.9 Explain or paraphrase words that may be unfamiliar to the audience

Make sure the audience understand key words—explain/show what they mean, as a multilingual audience may know the concept but not the word in English.

Even if you pronounce a word clearly and correctly, there is still a chance that the audience will not understand the word because they have never seen/heard it before. For example, imagine you are talking about crops and cereals. If you mention *rice* and *maize* and you have an audience of agrarians they will understand. But if you mention specialist or less familiar terms such as *cowpea* and *mung bean* then many people, even agrarians, might not understand even though you have used the correct words. In fact, they may think you have simply mispronounced another word. In such cases you can

- have the word on your slide and say "*a mung bean is a member of the pea family and is grown for manure and forage.*" (*manure* and *forage* should be comprehensible as they are sufficiently generic for agrarians)
- have a picture of a mung bean so that people may be able to recognize it

If you use a nontechnical word which you think the audience may not know, say it and then paraphrase it. Example: *These creatures are tiny, they are very small*.

2.10 Only use synonyms for nontechnical words

Having a written speech will also stop you from unneccessarily repeating the same word. Note below how the word "aim" appears three times in two sentences in the introduction in the original version, and the second sentence does not appear to add any new information.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The aim of this research project is to evaluate the role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships among health care trusts with an aim to mitigate shortcomings due to competition. Besides, this study aims to look into the effects generated by planning and control systems, or by the lack of these, within interorganizational relationships.	We wanted to/Our aim was to evaluate the role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships among health care trusts in order to mitigate shortcomings due to competition. Secondly, we were interested in the effects generated by planning and control systems, or by the lack of these, within interorganizational relationships.

To resolve the problem of repeated non-key words, you can do as in the revised version or

- find a synonym—in the first occurence *aim* could be replaced by *objective* or *target*
- delete it—in the second occurrence *with an aim* could be deleted with no loss of meaning

2.11 Be concise—only say things that add value

The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do. (Thomas Jefferson, chief author of the Declaration of Independence)

The more words you use

- the more mistakes in English you will make!
- the less time you have to give the audience important technical info

Here are some examples of sentences from the beginning of a presentation that could be deleted because they delay giving important information to the audience.

The work I am going to present to you today is . . .
My presentation always begins with a question.
I have prepared some slides.
This is presentation is taken from the first draft of my thesis.
The title of my research is . . .

Here are some phrases that could be reduced considerably, as shown by the brackets:

Testing [can be considered an activity that] is time consuming
The main aim of our research [as already shown in the previous slides] is to find new methodologies for calculating stress levels. [In order to do this calculation,] we first designed . . .

Finally these phrases below could be reworded to make them more concise:

Another thing we wanted to do was = We also wanted to
In this picture I will show you a sample = Here is a sample
Regarding the analysis of the samples, we analyzed them using = We analyzed the samples using . . . *or* Let's have a look at how we analyzed the samples.

2.12 Use verbs rather than nouns

Using verbs rather than nouns (or verb + noun constructions) makes your sentences shorter, more dynamic, and easier to understand for the audience.

X is meaningful for an understanding of Y = X will help you to understand Y
When you take into consideration = When you consider
This gives you the possibility to do X = This means you can do X./This enables you to do X.

2.13 Avoid abstract nouns

Abstract nouns such as *situation, activities, operations, parameters, issues* are more difficult to visualize than concrete nouns and thus more difficult to remember. Often they can simply be deleted.

Our research [activity] focused on . . .

If you find that your speech is full of words that end in *-ability, -acy, -age, -ance, -ation, -ence, -ism, -ity, -ment, -ness, -ship*, you probably need to think about deleting some of them or finding concrete alternatives or examples.

2.14 Avoid generic quantities and unspecific adjectives

Replace generic quantities such as *some, a certain quantity, a good number of* with a precise number.

I am going to give you a few examples = three examples
We have found some interesting solutions to this problem = four interesting solutions

Audiences like numbers:

- they make us more attentive because we start counting and we have a sense that we will be guided
- they give the information a more absorbable structure and thus help us to remember it better

Clearly the number of examples has to be low, otherwise the audience will think you will be talking all day. Or you can say

> We believe that there are possibly 10 different ways to solving this problem. Today I am going to outline the top two.

2.15 Occasionally use emotive adjectives

If you tell the audience you were "excited" about something, then they are more likely to become excited too, or at least be more receptive to what you are going to tell them. Good adjectives to use, for example, in descriptions of diagrams or when giving results, are *exciting, great, amazing, unexpected, surprising, beautiful, incredible.*

2.16 Choose the right level of formality

The style of language you adopt in your presentation will have a huge impact on whether the audience will

- want to listen to you, and their level of enjoyment/interest
- find you approachable and thus someone they might like to collaborate with

There are essentially three levels of formality:

1. formal
2. neutral/relatively informal
3. very informal

Although most presenters think they should aim for the first level of formality (which is generally only appropriate in a plenary), in reality most audiences prefer presenters who deliver their presentation in a relatively informal way. In English, this informality is achieved by using

- personal pronouns (e.g., I, we, you)
- active forms rather than passive forms (e.g., *I found* rather than *it was found*)
- verbs instead of nouns where possible

- concrete or specific nouns (e.g., cars) rather than technical or abstract nouns (e.g., vehicular transportation)
- short simple sentences rather than long complex ones

Think about levels of formality in your own language. Do you feel most natural speaking in a very formal way or a friendlier way? Is your dialect perceived as being friendlier than your official language? Would you tell a joke in your dialect or your official language? Studies of people who speak both a dialect and their official language show that when they wish to appear friendly, warm, and likeable they often choose to speak in dialect. On the other hand, choosing to speak in the official language distances them from their interlocutors and they are perceived as being colder but probably also as more authoritative and knowledgeable. The secret in presentations is thus to be not only seen as being both authoritative and competent but also as friendly and warm.

The two are not incompatible—the authoritativeness comes from *what* you say, the friendliness from *how* you say it.

Compare these versions from a presentation on analytical chemistry.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The application of the optimized procedure to the indigoid colorants allows their complete solubilization and the detection of their main components with quite good detection limits, estimated at about 1 ug/g for dibromindigotine. Here the markers are shown—dibromoindigotine for purple and indigotine for indigo.	When we used this optimized procedure on the indigoid colorants we managed to completely solubilize them. We were able to detect their main components within quite good limits, at about 1 ug/g for dibromindigotine. Here you can see the markers—dibromoindigotine for purple and indigotine for indigo.
The characterization of organic components was first performed by Py-GC-MS which did not reveal the characteristic compounds of indigo and purple. Quite surprisingly after pyrolysis at 600°C it was still possible to observe the pink color; the failure of the technique was attributed to the massive presence of the silicate clay and research is still in progress.	We initially characterized the organic components using Py-GC-MS. But this did not reveal the characteristic compounds of indigo and purple. In fact after pyrolysis at 600°C you can imagine how surprised we were to still see pink. We think this might have been due to the massive presence of silicate clay. In any case, we are still trying to find out why this happened.

Note how in the original versions

- there are no personal pronouns—it sounds like a paper rather than an oral presentation. In normal life, no one speaks like this
- all the verbs are in the passive—this tends to alienate rather than involve the audience
- there is a disproportionate number of nouns
- the sentences are long

The revised version uses lots of personal pronouns. This makes the speech more informal and colloquial and leads to shorter sentences, which are much easier to say. Some of the nouns in the original version have been converted into verbs, and passive verbs have been replaced with active forms. The audience is also addressed directly (*as you can imagine*). The result is that the speech sounds more natural and dynamic.

So when you finish writing your script, check that each sentence sounds like something that you might say to a colleague at lunch time. If it isn't, rephrase it in simpler terms so that the audience will feel that you are talking directly to them. This has big advantages for your English too. The simpler your sentences are the less likely you are to make mistakes when saying them.

2.17 Summary: An example of how to make a text easier to say

Imagine that the sentence below is part of a speech for a presentation. What problems do you think you would have if you had to say the original version aloud? And what problems would the audience have in understanding it?

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The main advantages of these techniques are a minimum or absent sample pre-treatment and a quick response; in fact due to the relative difficulty in the interpretation of the obtained mass spectra, the use of multivariate analysis by principal component analysis, and complete-linkage cluster analysis of mass spectral data, that is to say the relative abundance of peaks, was used as a tool for rapid comparison, differentiation, and classification of the samples.	There are two main advantages to these techniques. First, the sample needs very little or no pre-treatment. Second, you get a quick response. Mass spectra are really hard to interpret. So we decided to use two types of analysis: principal component and complete-linkage cluster. We did the analysis on the relative abundance of peaks. All this meant that we could compare, differentiate, and classify the samples.

The original version would be difficult to understand even if it were in a manuscript. The audience would find it hard to assimilate so much information at a single time. And for the presenter, it would be hard to breathe while saying such a long sentence (74 words!) without a pause.

The solution is to

- split the sentence up into very short chunks (12 words maximum) that are easy for you to say and easy for the audience to understand
- use more verbs (the original contains only four verbs but around 20 nouns)
- use the active form and personal pronouns

The revised version contains a series of short phrases. Short phrases do not mean that you express yourself in a simplistic way. You can give exactly the same information and keep all the technical terms that you need. And the result is something that sounds natural and that the audience will enjoy listening to. If you talk like in the first version you risk alienating or confusing your audience.

2.18 Tense tips

Tenses are used in different ways in different parts of the presentation. The most frequently used are

present simple: I work
present continuous: I am working
present perfect: I have worked
present perfect continuous: I have been working
past simple: I worked
future simple: I will work
future continuous: I will be working
going to: I am going to work

You can always either use full forms (e.g., *I will, I am*) or contracted forms (e.g., *I'll, I'm*). There is no difference in meaning, but the full forms can be used for emphasis, and the contracted forms sound more informal.

You don't need to have a perfect understanding of English grammar in order to be able to use the tenses correctly. I suggest that you consider the examples given in this subsection as useful phrases which you know that you can say at particular moments during your presentation.

More precise rules on the usage and meaning of these tenses can be found in the companion volumes:

English for Writing Research Papers
English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar

Note: All the examples given in this subsection illustrate correct phrases that you can say. There are no examples of the misusage of tenses.

2.18.1 Outline

Three tenses are usually used in outlines. When you outline your first point, just use either going to or the future continuous. For the other points, you can also use the future simple.

Let me just outline what **I'll be discussing** today.
First, **I'm going to tell** you something about the background to this work.
Then **I'll take** a brief look at the related literature and the methods we used.
Finally, and most importantly, **I'll show** you our key results.

2.18.2 Referring to future points in the presentation

Use either the future simple or the future continuous. In this context, there is really no difference in meaning.

As we **will see** in the next slide . . .
I'll tell you more about this later . . .
I **will give** you details on that at the end . . .

As we **will be seeing** in the next slide . . .
I'll be telling you more about this later . . .
I **will be giving** you details on . . .

Don't use the present continuous to refer to future parts of presentation. Only use it when informing the audience about what you are doing now or when hypothesizing about what they are probably thinking as they see the slide.

I **am showing** you this chart because . . .
Why **am I telling** you this? Well . . .
You **are** probably **wondering** why we did this, well . . .

2.18.3 Explaining the background and motivations

Use the present simple to talk about the general situation, established scientific fact, and to explain your opinions and hypotheses.

As **is** well known, smoking **causes** cancer. But what we **don't know** is why people still **continue** to smoke
Despite some progress, not much **is known** about . . .
Current practice **involves** doing X but we **believe** that doing Y would be more effective

Use the simple past for events and situations that have ended.

We **decided** to address this area because:
We **started** working on this in May last year.
Our initial attempts **failed** so we **had** to adopt a new approach.

Use the present perfect to talk about open issues, the progress that has been made in your field so far and when; the precise time is not important.

Several authors **have published** their findings on Y.
Other researchers **have tried** to address this problem, but no one **has yet managed** to solve it.
Not much progress **has been made** in this field so far.
Our experience **has shown** that . . .

2.18.4 Indicating what you did in (a) your research (b) while preparing your slides

You need to make a clear distinction between what you did in your research (simple past) and the choices you made when preparing your slides (present perfect).

We **selected** patients on the basis of their pathology
We **used** an XYZ simulator which we **acquired** from ABC.
We **concluded** that the difference between A and B must be due to C.
I **have included** this chart because . . .
I **have removed** some of the results for the sake of clarity . . .
I **have reduced** all the numbers to whole numbers . . .

2.18.5 Talking about the progress of your presentation

When you refer to what you have done up to this point in the presentation, use the present perfect. This is often used for making mini summaries before moving on to a new point.

So we **have seen** how X affects Y, now let's see how it affects Z.
I **have shown** you how this is done with Z, now I am going to show how it is done with Y.

But when you are talking about moments earlier in the presentation use the simple past.

As we **saw** in the first/last slide . . .
As I **mentioned** before/earlier/at the beginning . . .

2.18.6 Explaining and interpreting results

Use the simple past to say what you found during your research. But to explain what your findings mean, use the present tense plus modal verbs (*would, may, might*).

We **found** that in most patients these values were very high.
This **means/**This **may mean/**This **seems to suggest** that/This **would seem to prove** that patients with this pathology should . . .

2.18.7 Giving conclusions

Make sure you distinguish between what you did during your research (past simple) and what you have done during the presentation (present perfect).

Okay. So we **used** an innovative method to solve the classic problem of calculating the shortest route, and this **gave** some interesting results which we then **analyzed** using some ad hoc software.
During this presentation, I **have shown** you three ways to do . . .

2.18.8 Outlining future research

Various forms of the future will be needed here. Use the present continuous for actions in progress, and with verbs such as *plan, think about, assess the possibility* and *consider* to talk about possible plans. With *plan* and *hope* you can also use the present simple.

We **are currently looking** for partners in this project.
We **plan/are planning** to extend this research into the following areas . . .
We **hope/are hoping** to find a new way to solve PQR.

You can use a mix of the future continuous and the future simple to give the idea of an already scheduled plan:

In the next phase we **will be looking** at XYZ.
This **will involve** ABC.

Chapter 3
Pronunciation and Intonation

You will learn how to

- find out the pronunciation of your key words
- decide which words and phrases need emphasizing
- improve your intonation and avoid speaking in a monotone

Why is this important?

Many people in the audience will not be familiar with your type of accent. If they cannot understand what you are saying, your presentation cannot be successful.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
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3.1 Understand the critical importance of correct pronunciation

English is now an international language. It no longer "belongs" to the British, Americans etc. But the fact that it has no unique cultural identity of its own does not mean that there is no standard in pronunciation. Although there are many differences in pronunciation among native speakers (for example, not all native speakers pronounce the second *t* in *twenty*), no native speaker would pronounce the *gh* in *high* or *height*, the *b* in *doubt* or *debt*, the *w* in *yellow* or *write*, or the *d* in *Wednesday*. All such pronunciations are considered nonstandard for both native and non-native speakers.

Having the right pronunciation in a presentation is probably more critical than in any other situation where you will use English. In other circumstances your pronunciation probably does not seem very important to your interlocutors (the people with you), for one or more of the following reasons:

- you are of the same nationality as them, so your accent/pronunciation is very similar
- if they don't understand you they can simply ask you to repeat
- it doesn't really matter to them whether they understand you or not, as the information you are giving is not critical to them.

At an international conference, there will be people from many countries with many accents, they cannot ask you questions during the main part of your presentation, and most will be interested in understanding the information you are giving them. So, if you cannot pronounce the key words of your presentation correctly, the audience may not understand you and thus they will not be able to follow your presentation.

Pronouncing words correctly is fundamental.

An excellent way to learn the correct pronunciation of words is to use transcripts of oral presentations. Many news and education corporations (e.g., bbc.co.uk and ted.com) have podcasts on their websites where you can hear someone speaking and read the exact words in the transcript. You could try practicing reading the transcript yourself with the volume off. This will motivate you more strongly to listen to the correct pronunciation when you turn the volume back on.

3.2 Find out the correct pronunciation

You might not be conscious of the fact that you may not know the correct pronunciation of every word in your presentation. This could be because you have heard English words being pronounced by other non-native speakers from your own native country, and you unconsciously think that that is the correct pronunciation.

The sounds you have in your own language will certainly influence the sounds that you can and cannot produce in English.

If you are Chinese you may have problems differentiating between *l* and *r*, and pronounce a *v* as a *w*. But if you are Indian or German you may have the opposite problem and pronounce a *w* as a *v*. If you don't have aspirated sounds in your language then pronouncing *h* in *house* or *hardware* may be difficult. Certain vowel sounds can be very difficult, for example the vowel sound in *work* is hard to distinguish from that in *walk*.

The first step to improving your pronunciation is to discover what words you mispronounce so badly that the audience may not understand you.

To find out the English sounds that people of your language have difficulty with you can do an Internet search: "name of your language + English pronunciation + typical mistakes." If possible, find a site that (1) lists the typical sounds, (2) has audio (so that you can hear the sounds), and (3) illustrates the shape that your lips and tongue need to make to produce the relevant sound. If you don't have your lips and tongue in the right position it will be impossible for you to reproduce the correct sound.

There are two other ways to find out whether your particular pronunciation of individual words is correct.

The first is to ask a native speaker to listen to you practicing your presentation and write down every word that you pronounce incorrectly, and then teach you the correct pronunciation. This may be expensive and time consuming, but is very useful.

The second is to write out your entire speech (see Chapter 2) and convert it into a pdf file. Then you can use the Adobe reader to read your speech. The voice of the reader is robotic, but the pronunciation of individual words is very accurate and even the tone is generally good (e.g., a falling tone at the end of each phrase). Using Adobe you can

- note down where the stress falls on multisyllable words (e.g., ***ar****chitecture* not *archi****tec****ture*)
- listen for vowel sounds, and learn for example that *bird* rhymes with *word* and so has a different sound from *beard*
- understand which words you cannot pronounce. This means that you can find synonyms for non-key words and thus replace words that are difficult to pronounce with words that are easier. For example, you can replace
  - a multisyllabic word like *innovative* with a monosyllabic word like *new*
  - a word with a difficult consonant sound like *usua****ll****y* or ***th****esis*, with a word that does not contain that sound, *often or paper*
  - a word with a difficult vowel sound like *w****or****ldwide* with a word that has an easier vowel sound like *gl****o****bally*
- make a list of words that you find difficult to pronounce but which you cannot replace with other words, typically because they are key technical words
- understand which sentences are too long or would be difficult for you to say

3.3 Learn any irregular pronunciations

Unfortunately English has a very irregular pronunciation system. Often words that are spelled similarly have different pronunciations. This is particularly the case for words that you may never have heard spoken before. For example, if you are a researcher in plant life and irrigation, then the word *drought* (period of time when there is no rain) may be a key word for you. You would naturally associate it with words that you commonly use such as *thought* or *bought* which rhyme with *sort*. In reality, *drought* rhymes with *shout*, but if you pronounce it so that it rhymes with *thought* many in the audience will not understand you.

This is true not just for technical words. For example, imagine that you think that the pronunciation of the word *surface* sounds like *saw face*. Someone in the audience then asks you a question that includes the word *surface*, but they pronounce it correctly as *sir fiss*—in fact, *sur* rhymes with *her*, and *face* (in this context) rhymes with *kiss*. So you may not understand the question because the questioner's correct pronunciation of *surface* does not match the pronunciation of the word that you have in your head.

So it is essential that you create a list of key words that

- are contained in your speech/slides
- that might be used in questions from the audience

and that you learn the correct pronunciation.

3.4 Be very careful of English technical words that also exist in your language

A lot of English words have been adopted into other languages, often with different meanings but also with different pronunciations. Here are some English technical words and acronyms that are also found in many other languages: *hardware; back up, log in; PC, CD, DVD*.

Note that

- words that are made up of two words have the stress in English on the first syllable: *hardware, supermarket, mobile phone*
- words whose second part is a preposition also have the stress on the first syllable: *back up, log in*
- letters in acronyms have equal stress: *P-C, C-D, D-V-D*

It is a good idea to say the key words and English technical words more slowly.

Give equal stress and time to each letter in an acronym. Remember that an acronym such as IAE is very difficult to understand because it contains three vowels,

and vowels (and consonants too) tend to be pronounced differently in different languages. If you use acronyms in your presentation it is best to have them written on your slides too.

3.5 Practice the pronunciation of key words that have no synonyms

Imagine you want to say the following sentence, but that you regularly mispronounce the three words underlined: *Then I'll take a brief look at the related literature on methane and the methods we used.* Also, imagine that you cannot find synonyms for those three words.

The solution is to break down the word and identify which part is causing you problems. Let's imagine you are having difficulty with the last part of *literature*, and you are pronouncing *-ture* as *tour ray*. Think of other words ending in "-ture" that you know how to pronounce that end in those letters: *picture, nature, culture, feature*. If you know how to pronounce those words then you can also pronounce the *-ture* in *literature.*

Obviously you also need to be able to pronounce the first part of the word too. In this case it is useful to listen to Adobe reader or to use an online dictionary that pronounces the word for you. Notice that *literature* really only has three syllables. Try to transcribe the sound in a way that is meaningful for you: *li tri cher*. Alternatively, if you are familiar with phonetics, then you can use the phonetic transcription: ˈlɪtrətʃə(r)

Now let's look at *methane* and *method*. The problem with these words is typically in the first syllable. In this case find out the correct pronunciation (again using Adobe or a dictionary) and create a series of familiar words that will lead you to the correct pronunciation: *get > met > metal > method; see > me > meet > methane.* You can then practice the difficult words by reading them in association with the familiar words.

Note: the same combination of letters may have different stress or pronunciation, e.g., *method, methodology, methodological*; *photograph, photographer, photographic.*

3.6 Be careful of -ed endings

When you add -ed to form the past forms of a verb, you do not add an extra syllable. For example the verbs *focused, followed, informed* are NOT pronounced *focus sed/follow wed/inform med.* The number of syllables of a verb in its infinitive form (*fo cus*) and in its past form (*fo cust*) is the same. The only exceptions are verbs whose infinitive form ends in -d or -t , for example *added, painted*, which are pronounced *add did* and *paint tid*.

3.7 Enunciate numbers very clearly

You can help your audience by writing important numbers directly onto your slides. Also, remember to distinguish clearly between 13 and 30, 14 and 40, etc. Note where the stress is: *thir**teen thir**ty*. Make sure you enunciate clearly the *n* in *thirtee**n**, fourtee**n*** etc.

3.8 Avoid *er, erm, ah*

In order not to distract the audience, try hard not to make any nonverbal noises between words and phrases. You can stop yourself from saying "er" if you

- avoid using words like *and, but, also, however, which,* and *that* because your tendency is probably to say "er" every time you use them (e.g., *and er then er I did the tests but er this er also meant that er* ..)
- speak in short sentences
- pause/breathe instead of saying "er"

In any case if you practice frequently you will know exactly what you want to say, so you will not have to pause to think. Consequently there will be no gaps between one word or phrase and another, and thus no need to say "er."

You may not be aware that you make these noises. To check if you do, record yourself delivering the presentation.

3.9 Use your normal speaking voice

Much of the success of your presentation will be in how natural you sound to the audience. So practice talking as if you were talking to a friend. This is not a skill you have to learn. You already have this skill—what you have to do is to remove the barriers that are inhibiting you from talking in your normal way.

3.10 Help the audience to tune in to your accent

An "Outline" slide is a useful way of introducing key terminology as in the words in italics in the slide below.

OUTLINE

➢ Modification of *polymeric* materials
➢ *Bioreceptor-surface coupling*
➢ Characterization of *functionalized surfaces*

Give your audience a chance to tune into your key words at the very beginning of your presentation This will help them to understand you in the rest of the presentation.

So you could put up the slide and say,

> So here's what I will be talking about. [Pause for two seconds so that audience can absorb the content of the slide] I first became interested in modifying *polymeric* materials because .... Then one day we decided to try *coupling* the *bioreceptors* with the activated *surfaces*. So those are the two things that I will be looking at today, along with some approaches to characterizing *functionalized surfaces*.

The benefits are the audience will

- see and hear you say the key words and thus be able to connect your pronunciation with the words on your slide
- familiarize themselves with your voice without missing any vital information (you have simply told them why you are interested in this topic).

If you are still worried that people will not understand your pronunciation, you can point to the key words on the slide as you say them.

3.11 Don't speak too fast or too much

If you speak too fast, particularly when you are nervous, it makes it difficult for the audience to absorb what you are saying. And the impression may be that if you are presenting information very fast then it is not particularly important.

Make sure you pause frequently – do not talk continuously. Stop talking for between one and three seconds not only between slides, but also when giving explanations. The audience needs to have time to absorb what you are telling them, and they need a rest from hearing your voice.

3.12 Mark up your script and then practice reading it aloud

When you have created a final version of your script, you can mark it up as shown below. You probably won't have time to do a full markup for your whole presentation. But it is important that you do it for your introduction, which is the time when the audience is tuning in to your voice and making their first impressions. You should also do it for your conclusions. Also, it is a good idea to mark all those words that (a) you intend to give EMPHASIS to (b) those words that you find difficult to pronounce.

> **First** of all / thank you **very** much / for **coming** here today. My name's **Esther Kritz** / and I am currently doing **research** into **psycholinguistics** [sy/my] / at **Manchester** University. / / I'd like to show you / what **I** think / are some INCREDIBLE results / that I got while ...

Key

slash (/)—indicates where you want to pause. You only need to do this for the first 30-60 seconds of your presentation. A typical problem of the first few seconds of your presentation is that you are nervous and this makes you speak very fast. If you speak too fast the audience may have difficulty understanding. If you insert pauses this should encourage you to slow down and also to breathe. By breathing more you become more relaxed.

double slash (//)—indicates a longer pause. If you pause between key phrases it will focus the audience's attention on what you are saying and also give them time to digest it. Long pauses can have a positive dramatic effect.

bold—words that you want to stress in each phrase. This does not mean giving them a lot of stress but just a little more than the words immediately before and after. This stops you from speaking in a monotone (i.e., with equal stress on each word) which is boring for the audience. Words that tend to be stressed are key nouns, numbers, adjectives, some adverbs (e.g., significantly, unexpectedly), and verbs. Words that are not generally stressed are pronouns (unless to distinguish between two entities, e.g., *I gave it to **her** not to you*), non-key nouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and most adverbs.

CAPITALS—these are words that you want to give particular emphasis to. You may want to say them louder or more slowly or in a particular tone of voice. You do this to draw the audience's attention to what you are saying. Words that tend to be given extra emphasis are numbers and adjectives.

underline—indicates the stress within a particular word

[ ]—insert in brackets the sounds of words or syllables. For example, if you write *psy = my>sy*, this will remind you that you don't pronounce the initial "p" and that "sy" rhymes with "my" (as in "my book"). Alternatively you can try to find words or sounds in your own language that sound similar.

ADVANCED TIPS

3.13 Use synonyms for words on your slides that you cannot pronounce

You can have words on your slides that you are unable to pronounce. When you comment on your slides, you can use synonyms (i.e., words with the same meanings). For example, you may be listing the advantages and disadvantages of a particular procedure. On your slide you write

Advantages: a, b, c Disadvantages: x, y, z

Imagine that when you practice your presentation you realize that you cannot pronounce *disadvantage* easily. In fact, *disadvantage* has four syllables, so four chances of getting the stress wrong. Also, the final *-age* is not pronounced like *age* as in "at my age" but like *-idge* in *fridge*. So there are many chances of you getting the pronunciation wrong. The solution is to write "advantages and disadvantages" on the slide, but when you speak about the slide, you can say the "pros are" or the "good things are" and the "cons are" or "the bad things are." As you say, "pros" and "cons" you point to the items on your slides, so that everyone can understand that you when you say "pros" and "cons" you mean "advantages and disadvantages" —just in case someone in the audience is not familiar with the term "pros and cons."

3.14 Use stress to highlight the key words

English is a stress-timed language. The way you stress words should help to distinguish the nonessential (said more quickly and with no particular stress) from the important (said more slowly, with stress on key words).

Stress also indicates the meaning you want to give. Try saying the following sentences putting the stress on the words in italics.

Please *present* your paper next week.	(present rather than write)
Please present *your* paper next week.	(your paper not mine)
Please present your *paper* next week.	(paper not report)
Please present your paper *next* week.	(not this week)
Please present your paper next *week*.	(not next month)

Although the sentence is exactly the same, you can change the meaning by stressing different words. And the stress helps the listener to understand what is important and what isn't.

When you stress a word in a sentence you

- say the word more slowly than the ones before and the ones after
- raise the volume of your voice a little
- may decide to give your voice a slightly different tone or quality

Never put the stress on alternate words or always at the end or beginning of a sentence.

3.15 Vary your voice and speed

If the sound of your voice never changes or you have a very repetitive intonation (e.g., at the end of each phrase your voice goes up unnaturally or is significantly

reduced in volume), the audience will lose essential clues for understanding what you are saying and sooner or later they will go to sleep. You need to vary your

speed	how fast you say the words. Slow down to emphasize a particular or difficult point. Speed up when what you are saying is probably familiar to the audience or will be easy for them to grasp.
volume	how loud or soft you say the words—never drop your voice at the end of a sentence
pitch	how high or low a sound is
tone	a combination of pitch and the feeling that your voice gives

You can vary these four factors to show the audience what is important about what you are saying. You can create variety in your voice by

- imagining that your audience is blind or that there is a curtain between them and you—you are totally dependent on your voice to communicate energy and feeling
- listening to people who have interesting voices and analyzing what makes them interesting
- recording yourself and listening to your voice critically

3.16 Sound interested

If you don't sound interested in what you are saying, the audience will not be interested either. Presentations expert Jeffrey Jacobi, in his book *How to Say It—Persuasive Presentations,* recommends reading texts aloud that express strong opinions or are full of colorful language, for example, letters to the editor (of newspapers), children's stories, and advertisements. Initially, you can practice in your own language and then move on to English.

Another way is to practice your presentation using different types of voice and mood: angry, happy, sarcastic, and authoritative.

Chapter 4
Practice and Learn from Other People's Presentations

You will learn how to

- identify which parts of the presentation to practice the most
- be self-critical
- transmit confidence through your body language
- find presentations on the web

Why is this important?

The more you practice the better your presentation will be and the more you will be able to exploit the benefits of presenting at a congress. You will avoid arriving at the presentation venue unprepared and nervous.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_4, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

4.1 Use your notes

If you have prepared a script, as suggested in Chapter 2, then your initial practice could simply be to read your script aloud so that you become familiar with what you want to say. Then, abandon your script completely and just use notes (see Section 2.2).

As you practice, if any phrase or word does not come easily to you, try to modify it until what you want to say comes quickly and naturally.

Finally, put your notes on a table, and try doing the presentation aloud without looking at your notes. Of course, if you forget what to say, then quickly look at your notes.

> Even the best presenters make use of notes on the day of their presentation—it is standard practice and no one will think it is unprofessional if you occasionally look down to remember what you want to say.

4.2 Vary the parts you practice

Given time constraints, people often manage only to practice part of their presentation at a single time. The result may be that you only practice the first half of your presentation. So it is a good idea to occasionally begin in the middle, or begin with the conclusions—don't just focus on the technical part. Also, don't forget to practice answering questions—imagine the question, and then answer it in various ways (including imagining that you didn't understand the question).

In any case, practice the opening and the ending again and again and again. These are the two parts of the presentation where you should not improvise, and where it helps considerably if you know exactly what you are going to say. First and last impressions are the ones that remain with the audience.

4.3 Practice your position relative to the screen

Try to reproduce the real conditions of the conference room. So if you are practicing with colleagues don't stand right next to them, but at a distance. Use a desk as a podium, and imagine the screen is behind you. Think about the best place to stand.

If you stand in front of the screen, the beam will light you up and the audience won't really be able to see you. One solution is simply to turn the screen off (using the B key on PowerPoint).

To avoid blocking your slides from the audience's view, stand to one side of the screen. Only move in front of it when it is strictly necessary to point to things on your slides.

Note that if you stand on the left side of the screen, you will probably focus just on those members of the audience on the right-hand side (and vice versa). So you need to keep swapping sides.

Make sure you make eye contact with everyone including those at the back. If you don't give certain sections of the audience regular eye contact, they will start to lose interest.

You can practice this by yourself at home. Stand at one end of the biggest room of your house. Imagine that the items of furniture (chairs, tables, desks, shelves, even windows) in various parts of the room are members of the audience. Practice talking to each item. Spend no more than three seconds on each item of furniture, then move on to another item.

Avoid focusing on a single individual in the audience for more than two seconds, otherwise this individual will feel uneasy.

It also helps if you can project your slides onto a wall. This will help you become familiar with learning not to look at your slides, but at the audience. Of course, if you only have a minimal number of slides that you don't really need to look at (because they are so simple or easy for you to remember) then you will have less temptation to look behind you. In any case, you should be able to deliver your first 60 seconds without looking behind you at the screen, or at your laptop or at your notes.

4.4 Don't sit. Stand and move around

It is a good idea not to sit and talk into the laptop. When you are sitting your voice does not project as well.

You can also make better eye contact with people further back simply by leaving the podium and moving around the room. This will also help you feel more relaxed. It is also an excellent way of gaining the audience's attention, rather than the screen being their focus of attention. But make sure there are no wires in your path as you may trip over them.

If you move in a relaxed, but not repetitive, manner in front of the audience, it will give them the impression that you are at ease and comfortable in the presentation environment. And by implication your ease will make the audience think you are confident about your presentation itself.

Standing in a different position once every two or three minutes will also help you to remember not to focus on just one section of the audience.

4.5 Use your hands

Do whatever comes most naturally to you with your hands and arms. Inexperienced presenters often begin by rigidly holding their arms to their sides, or folding them across their chest. Such positions tend to make the audience feel that you are nervous or maybe a bit hostile. So try and move your hands around as soon into

the presentation as possible. A perfect point to do this is in your outline, where you can use your right hand to touch the fingers of your left hand to indicate your three/four main points. For instance, by saying "*first I want to, second . . . third*."

Some people find it helps them overcome their nervousness by holding something in their hands, for instance the remote control, a pointer, or a pen. Try only to do this for a few minutes, as it stops you making full use of your hands.

Others find they are more relaxed with their hands in their pockets, but this may make the audience feel that the presenter is not very professional.

In any case, avoid things that may be distracting for the audience such as playing with your ring or scratching any part of your body.

Many good presenters use their hands to add extra emphasis to what they are saying. However, if for cultural reasons you feel that using your hands would be a sign of disrespect or lack of professionalism for the majority of the audience, then do what feels comfortable for you.

4.6 Have an expressive face and smile

If you show interest through your facial expression then the audience will feel it and will themselves become more enthusiastic about what you are saying.

If you just have a blank expression, then you will not transmit any positive feelings to your audience.

The only way that you can show genuine enthusiasm is to feel it. This means that you need to identify areas of your research (or even of your life as a researcher, or about your country or town) which you truly find special, which you think the audience will find interesting, and which you can talk about with passion.

You can practice smiling in front of a mirror, and if you smiling doesn't come naturally to you then you can even attend smiling courses in the USA and the UK! But if you find it difficult to smile, don't worry, you can replace a smile with a passionate delivery and the occasional forceful hand gesture.

4.7 Learn how to be self-critical: practice with colleagues

Learning to be able to evaluate your own presentation and your presentation skills is key to giving an effective scientific talk.

If you are going to a conference with a group of colleagues, this is a perfect opportunity to practice beforehand by doing your presentations in front of each other. If you ask your colleagues *"How did I do?"* or *"What do you think?"* they will probably just give you some vague encouraging comment. Instead it helps to have a check list with which to assess each other.

Bear in mind that the things you find ineffective in your colleagues' presentations may be exactly the same kind of mistakes you make, so you can certainly learn from other people's errors.

On the next page are some points that you may find useful to include.

Personal Presentation Assessment Sheet

Rate the performance of the presenter: 1 poor, 2 satisfactory, 3 good

Structure
Strong beginning—topic introduced clearly
Overall topic previewed
Clear transitions and links between points
Clear conclusions and strong ending

Slides
Clear text
Simple diagrams
Not too much detail
No distracting colors, fonts, animations

Voice/Delivery
Right speed—did not begin in a rush
Clear and loud voice
Short clear phrases, individual words articulated clearly
No annoying noises (er, erm, um)
Good pronunciation
Enthusiastic and friendly
Sounded credible

Audience involvement
Attention of audience immediately gained
Topic clearly related to audience
Audience personally involved in some way
Variety to maintain attention

Body Language
Eyes on audience, not on screen
Moved around
Used hands appropriately

Ideally, you should do your presentation twice. In one of the two sessions, your audience should stop you every time you

- say a word they cannot understand—this enables you to understand which words you need to practice pronouncing or simply replace with a synonym
- look at the screen or your laptop instead of them

Practicing with your colleagues who are also attending the same conference has another advantage: they will know what to expect from you. This means that when you see them sitting in the audience at the conference you know that they

are going to react positively and give you encouragement. If they haven't seen your presentation before, you may be unsure of their response and this may make you lose confidence.

4.8 Analyze other people's slides

There are several sites on the Web where you can share slides (for example: slideshare.net, myplick.com). These sites are useful for seeing how other researchers in similar fields to yours create their slides. By answering the questions below in the assessment sheet, you should be able to discover what type of slides work best, and then try to integrate these types of slides into your own presentations.

Presentation Slides Assessment Sheet

1. How interesting is the title? Does it appeal to a narrow or broad audience?
2. How much information is contained in the title slide? Is the title and name of presenter given the most prominence?
3. Is there a variety of slide types—text, photos, diagrams? Or is it simply a series of slides with bullets?
4. Within a single slide is the text clear and short? Or is the slide crowded?
5. Is the font clear? Are there too many fonts and sizes?
6. Do some slides seem to be cut and pastes from text articles?
7. Are the illustrations and photos clear?
8. Are statistics used? How do they help?
9. When looking at the slides, did you have the feeling of following a story or did they seem unconnected?
10. Are there any conclusions? Are the conclusions clear?
11. What does the final slide show/say? How effective/original is it?

4.9 Watch presentations on the Internet

There are thousands of scientific presentations available to watch on the Internet - some filmed and delivered by professionals and others by amateurs. One of the most professional sites is TED.com. In its own words it offers *Riveting talks by remarkable people, free to the world.*

"Riveting" means that the presentations are so good that they will gain your attention and you will want to keep watching.

You can choose the topic of the presentations you want to watch by using TED's search engine, and you can also choose whether to have English subtitles on or not. The subtitles report every single word and are particularly useful for seeing (not just hearing) how many words a presenter uses in a sentence. This highlights that the shorter the sentence is, the easier it is for the presenter to say, and the easier it

Presentation Delivery Assessment Sheet

	THE PRESENTER TENDS TO DO THIS	RATHER THAN THIS
CORE FOCUS	Clarifies the main point of the presentation immediately—it is clear to the audience why they should listen	The main point only emerges towards the end—audience not clear where the presentation is going
PACE/SPEED	Varies the pace i.e., speaks slowly for key points, faster for more obvious information; pauses occasionally	Maintains the same speed throughout; no pauses
TEXT IN SLIDES	Little or no text	A lot of text
STRUCTURE	Each new point is organically connected to the previous point	There are no clear transitions or connections
GRAPHICS	Simple graphics or complex graphics built up gradually	Complex graphics
FORMALITY	Sounds like a normal human being, enthusiastic, sincere	Sounds very academic
STYLE	Narrative: you want to hear what happened next	Technical
PERSONAL VS IMPERSONAL	Lots of personal pronouns and active forms of verbs	Passive forms
LANGUAGE	Dynamic adjectives, very few linkers (also, in addition, moreover, in particular, etc.,)	Academic, neutral (no emotive adjectives), many linkers
RELATION WITH AUDIENCE	Involves/entertains the audience— thus maintaining their attention	seems to be talking to himself/herself, not to the audience
ABSTRACT VS CONCRETE	Gives examples	Focuses on abstract theory
STATISTICS	Gives counterintuitive/interesting facts	Makes little or no use of facts/statistics
BODY LANGUAGE	Eyes on audience, moves around, moves hands, stands away from the Screen	Eyes on screen, PC, ceiling, Floor; static, blocks screen
AT THE END	You are left feeling inspired/positive	You are indifferent

is for the audience to understand. You can also see a full transcript (called "interactive transcript") of the presentation in English, plus translations in several other languages. This means that you can note down any useful phrases that the speaker uses that you think you could use too.

On TED you will see presentations given by experts. No one is expected to give such high quality presentations at their first attempt. It takes time and practice.

But you can learn a lot from these experts. You can use the assessment sheet below to decide which aspects of presentation styles in the first column ("The presenter tends to do this") the presenter uses and which styles you liked and why. Then you can perhaps think of ways to incorporate these aspects into your own presentations.

4.10 Test yourself on what you remember of the presentations you've watched

Watching these presentations should also help you to understand that packing a presentation full of detail is not usually a good approach.

When you have watched five or six presentations on TED (or whatever site), write down what you remember about the content and about the presenter and his/her style. You will be surprised how little you remember about the information that was given. Repeat the same memory exercise a week later and you probably won't even remember how many presentations you watched. However, the impression that the presenter made on you and their style of presenting may remain for longer.

What this means is that there is no point filling your presentation with descriptions of complex procedures or masses of data, because the audience will simply not remember. What they will remember from that experience is their frustration in not being able to absorb the information you gave them. Make sure you always give your audience a positive experience.

4.11 Improve your slides after the presentation

When you do your presentation live in front of a real audience it sometimes reveals faults that did not appear while you were practicing. Look at your slides with a critical eye and ask yourself

- why was this slide necessary? If I cut it, what would change?
- did this slide really support the objective of my presentation?
- why did I include this info? Was it relevant/interesting/clear? What impact did it have?
- could I have expressed this info in a clearer or more pertinent way?

- was this series of slides in the best order? Was there anything missing in the series?
- were these slides too similar to each other? Did they really gain the audience's attention?

After your presentation, write down the questions you were asked, so that the next time you do the same presentation you will have the answers ready.

Chapter 5
Handling Your Nerves

You will learn how to

- reduce your fears, avoid becoming blocked, and speak calmly and relatively slowly
- focus on content rather than problems connected with your level of English
- prepare for things that might go wrong

Why is this important?

Although 90% of your nervousness is not visible to the audience, if you feel confident rather than nervous this will have a huge impact on the success of you presentation.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_5, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

5.1 Identify your fears

Think about why you get nervous, for example,

> I am worried that the audience won't understand my accent . . .
>
> My English grammar and vocabulary are very poor, but if I was doing the presentation in my own language . . .
>
> I get very nervous when I am in front of a lot of people, so there's nothing I can really do about it . . .
>
> My results aren't very interesting so I can hardly create a good presentation around them . . .

Everybody usually has some kind of worry about doing a presentation and there are many ways to help you overcome such fears. Most of them involve things that you can do before the day of your presentation.

5.2 Don't focus on your English

If your content makes your message clear, a few mistakes in English will make no difference. The audience is made up of scientists wanting to hear your results, they are not English teachers wanting to assess your linguistic proficiency. The way you relate to the audience and involve them is more important than any grammatical or nontechnical vocabulary mistakes that you may make.

If you make an English mistake while doing your presentation

- don't worry (the audience may not even notice)
- don't correct yourself—this draws attention to the mistake and interrupts your train of thought

Chapters 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9 should help you considerably to improve your English by writing short simple phrases. You can also integrate many of the useful phrases listed in Chapter 17.

If you are extremely worried about doing a presentation in English, then you could opt for a poster session.

5.3 Write in simple sentences and practice your pronunciation

You only need a limited knowledge of English grammar to do a presentation, complicated forms such as conditionals and continuous forms are not generally required. You could probably manage by just knowing the present simple, past simple, *will*, and the passive form. In addition, you can try to use simple sentences that do not entail complex grammar.

A typical ten-minute presentation includes between 300 and 450 different words (depending on the incidence of technical terms and how fast the presenter speaks).

The number of different words in 15 or 20-minute presentations does not usually rise by more than 10–20 words compared to a shorter presentation, since most of the key words tend to be introduced in the first ten minutes.

Of these different words, the majority are words that you will certainly be already very familiar with: pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions, articles, and common verbs. From my experience in teaching PhD students to do presentations, the average person may need to use between 10 and 20 words that might create difficulty in pronunciation. And learning the correct pronunciation for such a limited number of words is not difficult.

You can identify possible problems with your English if you write a script.

See Chapter 2 Writing out your speech in English

5.4 Identify points where poor English might be more problematic

If you don't have the time and/or money to write a speech and have it revised, then try to make your English as perfect as possible

- in the introduction
- while explaining the agenda
- when making transitions from one series of slides to another series
- in the conclusions
- when calling for questions

These are the points when the audience will notice the mistakes the most and when they are forming their first and last impression of you, i.e., the impressions that will remain with them after the presentation.

Handling your nerves generally comes with practice—the more presentations you do the less nervous you will become. The rest of this chapter outlines strategies to reduce your nervousness.

5.5 Have a positive attitude

Although you may not be a born presenter, you will probably have one or more of the following qualities:

- an above average knowledge and considerable experience in your field
- a passion for what you do
- an ability to explain difficult technical things clearly
- an ability to find the exact answer to questions from the audience
- a professional look
- a sense of humor

Try to use these qualities to give yourself confidence and to show the audience that you know what you are talking about even if your English is not perfect. Focus on what makes you unique: your nationality, your background, your specialist knowledge.

A good presentation requires many skills that can only be learned over time. If in the past you did a bad presentation very probably it was because you had not prepared sufficiently. When you then have to do your second presentation you will have that bad memory of the first. It is important to put that bad experience behind you. Do not let it condition you. Concentrate on getting it right the second time by preparing good content and then practicing it in front of as many people as you can.

5.6 Prepare good slides and practice

You can considerably reduce your nerves if you feel you have prepared well.

If you know your slides are good, this will help you overcome some of your fears. Then during the actual presentation, when you get a good reaction to your slides and to what you say, this will automatically give you extra confidence.

5.7 Opt to do presentations in low-risk situations

The best thing is to begin your presentation career by presenting in low-risk situations, for example in front of undergraduate students at your department and at national (rather than international) conferences. Presenting in your own language will certainly help you to get the skills you need for presenting in English.

You could also offer to do teaching work at your department or institute. Teaching experience is excellent training for presentations because you have to learn to explain things clearly and engage your students. Also, as a teacher you will naturally be at the center of attention and this will help you to get used to it.

5.8 Use shorter and shorter phrases

As you practice try and make your phrases shorter and shorter. Short phrases give you time to pause quickly and to breathe between one phrase and the next—this will slow your speed down if you are nervous.

5.9 Learn relaxation techniques

As you know from taking exams, being slightly nervous actually helps you to perform better. If you are too relaxed you become overconfident. Don't worry about your nerves, they will soon disappear a couple of minutes into the presentation.

Make sure you sleep well the night before. Don't stay up all night rewriting your slides. You should arrive at the presentation feeling fresh, not tired. If you feel stiff and rigid at the beginning of a presentation you may need to learn some relaxation techniques.

Do some physical exercises before you begin:

- breathe in deeply
- relax/warm your neck and shoulder muscles
- exercise your jaw

5.10 Get to know your potential audience at the bar and social dinners

Talk to as many people as you can over coffee breaks and meals. Knowing in advance who is coming to your talk may make you feel more relaxed as they will be friendly faces in the audience.

If the audience has met you before you begin your presentation they will also probably be more motivated to listen to you. In any case, remember that at the beginning of your presentation the audience will be on your side—they will want you to succeed.

Talking to as many people as possible should also enable you to assess their knowledge of your topic and also to convince them to come and watch you rather than attend a parallel session.

5.11 Check out the room where your presentation will be

It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the room where you are going to be doing the presentation. Try to imagine yourself in the room doing your presentation. Then think/find out about

- how loud you will have to speak given the size of the room and how far you are from the audience
- whether you will need a microphone
- where you will position yourself so that the audience can always see you and so that you don't trip over any wires
- how the remote control works e.g., how you can blank the screen without turning the projector off (the button is generally called "blank", "hide", "mute" or "no show"); and how effective the laser pointer is
- where chalk and pens are available for the blackboard/whiteboard
- whether bottles/cups of water will be provided

5.12 Prepare for forgetting what you want to say

A frequent problem is forgetting a specific word or phrase that you need to say.
There are three good solutions for this; you can

- look at your notes
- drink some water, or take out a handkerchief to wipe your nose, and use this time to remind yourself
- say "*I am sorry I can't think of the word. In any case. . .*" And then you simply proceed with the next point

5.13 Prepare for the software or the equipment breaking down

Your presentation will probably be uploaded for you onto the conference PC. Test that everything works correctly as much time in advance of your presentation as possible. This is important as there are different software versions and sometimes incompatibilities between Macs and PCs (particularly regarding animations).

Some of the most successful presentations are done with no slides. If you have a printout of your slides and your computer breaks down completely then you can continue without the slides, and if necessary draw graphs on a whiteboard.

In any case, it is a very good idea to practice for such a breakdown, i.e., to give your presentation without any slides. It will teach you two things: (1) it is possible to do a presentation with no slides (2) it will show you which of your slides are probably redundant.

5.14 Organize your time

Presentations rarely go according to plan. So allow for

- the previous presenter going over his/her allocated time, meaning that you have less time to do your preparation
- people arriving late

Prepare for this by

- knowing exactly how much time you need for each part of your presentation
- having your most important points near the beginning of the presentation, never just in the second half
- thinking in advance what slides you could cut, particularly those in the latter part of the presentation
- planning how to reduce the amount you say for particular slides
- using options in your presentation software that allow you to skip slides

You cannot calculate the length of your presentation from the number of your slides. For example, if you are doing a 10-minute presentation you may spend two minutes on the title slide as you introduce yourself and the topic. Then the next slides in which you explain the background, describe your methods, and give your results may require just one minute or less each. The most important slides should be your discussion and conclusions, and you may spend more than two minutes each on these. Also, there should be parts in your presentation in which you do not need slides. This means that you need to time the whole presentation to see how long it takes, and then decide where you could make cuts if on the day of the presentation you don't have your full allocated time.

Sometimes during a presentation you are so focused that you can't even remember at what time the presentation is supposed to end (particularly if times have been changed from the original schedule). Write down the finishing time on a piece of paper and have the paper beside your laptop. You should also have your watch beside your laptop—although your laptop has its own clock, seeing your watch on the desk will remind you to check the time.

If you do run out of time don't suddenly say "*I will have stop here*." Instead, briefly make a conclusion.

If you are ahead of schedule you can have a longer Q&A session at the end of the presentation. In any case, don't feel that you have to fill the amount of time you have been allocated. No one is going to complain if you finish a few minutes early. But they may complain if you finish late!

Part II
What to Write on the Slides

The audience does not need to see, or hear about, all the data you have collected. The data needs editing so that you only present concise and relevant evidence to justify any point you make.

Trevor Hassall and John Joyce

Chapter 6
Titles

You will learn how to

- choose a title for your presentation
- decide what to include in your first slide
- be concise

Why is this important?

- The title of your presentation is like an advertisement—you want as many people as possible to interested in it, so it should not be too technical or too generic.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
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6.1 Decide what to include in the title slide

There is no standard way to construct a title slide, but most presenters prioritize information by using different font sizes. The two most important elements, which should be given the most space, are

1. the title
2. your name

Other things that some presenters sometimes include are

3. the name and date of the conference
4. co-authors
5. the name and/or logo of your institute/research unit
6. your supervisor
7. acknowledgments
8. sponsors
9. a photo
10. a background image

Some of the best presenters use their title slide to attract audience attention. They do this either by completely ignoring points 3–7 above, or by putting such details in a very small font. Points 3–7 generally contain no information that 99.9% of the audience need to know or that they can't find out from the conference program.

Point 3 has become a kind of standard way to show that the presentation is not simply a recycled version of a previous one—this goes to the extent of putting the conference name and date on every single slide. This seems totally unnecessary.

Points 4–7 tend to be included exclusively to satisfy colleagues, professors, supervisors, and those that have helped during your research. It probably makes more sense to thank these people personally away from the conference. If you are part of a research team, there is no need to list all the names of the people in your team. If you absolutely must give acknowledgments to such people, then it is probably a good idea to put their names in a small font and in a nonprominent position in your slide. Similarly, if you have participated in many projects, you don't need to write the names of these projects. This kind of information is very pertinent to you, but it is usually of no interest to the audience. You could simply say, "*There are 14 people in our team and we have already participated in 10 projects.*" That is all the audience needs to know.

You may have a contractual obligation to mention sponsors (Point 8).

Points 9 and 10 may help to make your title slide look more interesting. Typical photos and background images include elements of your research or photos (or maps) from your country of origin.

The more information you have on your title slide the more it will detract away from the most important things: your title and your name.

6.2 Remove all redundancy

When you have decided on your title, rewrite it removing redundant words (in square brackets in the examples below) and leaving in only key words.

The ligno-cellulose biomass fuel chain [: a review]

[A study on] producing bread [in Andalucia] with [the] acid moisture [technique]

[Development of] a Portable Device for Work Analysis to Reduce Human Errors in Industrial Plants

[Issues of] language rights and use in Canada

6.3 Make sure your title is not too technical for your audience

The title of your presentation is a like an advertisement for a product, so consider not using the title of your thesis or paper as the title of your presentation. An interesting title is more likely to attract people to your presentation, and titles of papers and theses are rarely designed to attract the attention of an audience.

Attendees sometimes watch presentations in fields that are not strictly their own, but perhaps where they feel they might be able to apply their findings or because they are looking for new areas of research. It may thus be useful to think of titles to your presentations that are likely to engage a wider audience, which is not all made up of experts in your precise field of research.

Here are some examples of alternative titles:

TECHNICAL	NONTECHNICAL
A Pervasive Solution for Risk Awareness in the context of Fall Prevention in the Elderly	Stop your grandmother from falling
An evaluation of the benefit of the application of usability and ergonomics principles to consumer goods	I hate this product! How the hell does it work?
Construction and validation of a carrier to shuttle nucleic acid-based drugs from biocompatible polymers to living cells	Q: How can we get nucleic acid-based drugs from biocompatible polymers to living cells? A: Use a shuttle
Contact Force Distribution in the Interference Fit between a Helical Spring and a Cylindrical Shaft	Will this fastener kill me?

Notice how in each case, the nontechnical titles contain verbs. Verbs give the idea of dynamism, nouns don't. You may think that the last title—Will this fastener kill me?—is too obscure. However you would probably be curious to see what it was about.

Look at the title below from a Bangladeshi researcher at a congress in Italy:

> Preparation, characterization, and degradability of low environmental impact polymer composites containing natural fibers

It describes some work on composites based on natural fibers, which are materials with a much lower environmental impact. He began by quoting an article from The Record:

> Getting ordinary plastic bags to rot away like banana peels would be an environmental dream come true. After all, we produce five hundred billion a year worldwide. And they take up to one thousand years to decompose. They take up space in landfills. They litter our streets and parks. They pollute the oceans. And they kill the animals that eat them.

He had a quick series of slides (with no titles or text) with photos to illustrate his concepts: plastic bags, banana peels, landfills, litter, and polluted oceans. Notice also how he used very short sentences—these were easy for him to say and were dynamic for the audience.

And at the end of his presentation he returned to his original statistic. He asked a few people in the audience how many bags they thought they used a month, and on the basis of that number, he told them them how many years it would take to cover the whole of Italy (where the congress was being held) if everyone in the country used the same number of bags per month.

He certainly managed to attract the audience's attention with this interesting information, but he might have had a bigger audience if he had called his presentation:

> Can natural fibers save the planet?
>
> Can natural fibers save Italy?
>
> Italy is slowly disappearing under polyethylene bags
>
> Bags, bags and more bags
>
> Will we all be suffocated by plastic bags?

By giving his presentation a very academic title, those people at the congress not specifically interested in polymer composites might have been discouraged from attending his talk.

6.4 Use a two-part title to attract both a general and a technical audience

If the Bangladeshi researcher mentioned above was worried about being too informal, he could have used a two-part title, in which one is technical and the other is more appealing to a generic audience. On the next page are some examples:

ONE-PART TITLE	TWO-PART TITLE
Preparation, characterization, and degradability of low environmental impact polymer composites containing natural fibers	How can we stop Italy disappearing under polyethylene bags? Using low environmental impact polymer composites containing natural fibers
Anti-tumor activity of bacterial proteins: study of the p53-azzurine interaction	Azzurrine binds to p53. Towards a nontoxic alternative to chemotherapy?
The discoursal construction of audience identity in undergraduate assignments	Who or what is the students' audience? The discoursal construction of audience identity in undergraduate assignments

Another alternative is to have both titles in the conference program, and just the fun/more informal title on your title slide.

6.5 Don't be too concise in titles—use verbs and prepositions not just nouns and adjectives

What is the problem with this title?

An innovative first-year PhD student scientific English didactic methodology

When you start reading it, it seems to have one meaning. But when you finish, it seems to have another meaning. The problem is that this title is a string of adjectives + nouns + nouns that act as adjectives.

A much easier title to understand would be

An innovative methodology for teaching scientific English to first-year PhD students

Good titles put

- the adjective next to the noun it refers to (*innovative* refers to *methodology* not to *students*)
- have a verb (*teaching*)
- use prepositions (*for, to*)

Some more examples showing the use of verbs are given below:

NO VERBS	WITH VERBS
The implementation of sustainable strategies in multinational companies	Implementing sustainable strategies in multinational companies
TOF-SIMS: an innovative technique for the study of ancient ceramics	TOF-SIMS: an innovative technique for studying ancient ceramics
Fault detection of a Five-Phase Permanent-Magnet Motor - a four-part solution	Four ways to detect faults in a Five-Phase Permanent-Magnet Motor
Effect of crop rotation diversity and nitrogen fertilization on weed management in a maize-based cropping system	How does crop rotation diversity and nitrogen fertilization affect the way weeds are managed in a maize-based cropping system?

6.6 Check your grammar

The rules of grammar, particularly the use of articles (*a, an, the*) also apply in titles. Can you find the grammatical mistakes in the ungrammatical titles below?

UNGRAMMATICAL	GRAMMATICAL
Multimodality in the context of Brain-Computer Interface	Multimodality in the context of a Brain-Computer Interface/of Brain Computer Interfaces
Importance of role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships in health care sector	The importance of the role of planning and control systems in supporting interorganizational relationships in the health care sector
Iran Foreign Policy	Iran's Foreign Policy

6.7 Check your spelling

Titles of presentations often contain spelling mistakes. This is particularly true if the title of the presentation is also the title of your thesis. You have seen that title so often that when you look at it on your slide you don't actually read it because it is so familiar to you. Can you find the spelling mistakes in these titles?

The Rethoric of Evil in German Literature

Governance choice in railways: applying empirical transaction costs economics to the the railways of Easter Europe and the former USSR

Hearth attack! Cardiac arrest in the middle aged

In the first example *rethoric* seems correct because it looks as if it reflects the pronunciation (correct: *rhetoric*). In the second and third examples it should be *Eastern* and *Heart* respectively—unfortunately no spell check system would have found the mistakes because *Easter* and *Hearth* are also correct spellings (but with entirely different meanings). Also, there is the repetition (*the the*) which you may not notice: although they are in sequence they appear on different lines.

ADVANCED TIPS

6.8 Use slide titles to help explain a process

When the main purpose of your presentation is to explain a process or how a piece of equipment works, it is a good idea to use your slide titles to explain each step in the process. Here are titles of the first six slides from an engineering presentation. Each slide simply has a title and then a diagram or picture, which the presenter then explains.

Slide 1: Title slide: 3D Laser milling modeling: the effect of the plasma plume
Slide 2: Laser Milling: a process well suited for mold manufacturing
Slide 3: Laser Milling Centers consist of various sub-systems
Slide 4: The laser beam is controlled by a Laser Beam Deflection Unit
Slide 5: A valid estimation of the Material Removal Rate is required
Slide 6: Many parameters affect the Material Removal Rate

Notice that there is no "Outline" slide. The presenter used slide 1 to introduce himself and his research area. Then slides 2 and 3 provided some background information. And then the later slides described how the laser worked. The audience was guided step by step and even a nonengineer like myself was able to follow.

6.9 Think of alternative titles for your slides

When thinking of titles for your slides, bear in mind the quantity of slides that an audience will see over a typical two-day congress. Ask yourself how much audience attention you are likely to attract by a series of titles such as, Introduction - Methodology - Discussion - Conclusion and Future Work - Thank you for your attention - Any questions?

If your slot is near the end of the morning or afternoon (particularly on the last day of the conference), you need to think of alternative titles. Avoid words that give no real information and which the audience has probably seen a hundred times since the beginning of the conference such as, *activity, investigation, overview.*

Here are some possible alternative titles to the typical sections of a presentation:

Outline:	Why?	Why should you be excited?
Methodology:	How?	Don't try this at home
Results:	What did we find?	Not what we were expecting
Discussion:	So what?	Why should you care?
Future work:	What next?	Men at work
Thank you:	That's all folks	See you in *name of location of next conference*

Chapter 7
Writing and Editing the Text of the Slides

You will learn how to

- decide when, and when not, to use full sentences
- reduce the amount of duplication between what the audience read and what you say

Why is this important?

Over a three-day conference the average attendee will see between 300 and 500 slides. That's a lot of slides and a lot of effort on the audience's eyes. Your aim should be for the audience to quickly assimilate the information on your slides and then focus on you. The less text there is, the quicker the audience will focus on what you are saying. You will also be less tempted to "read" your slides.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
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7.1 Be aware of the dangers of PowerPoint

If you buy 20 tubes of paint you don't automatically have a painting. Likewise, if you create a set of PowerPoint or keynote slides you don't automatically have a presentation. You just have a set of slides.

A presentation is slides plus a lot of practice.

Try practicing your presentation without using any slides. If you find it difficult, it means you are relying too much on your slides.

Presentation software templates encourage you to

1. create a series of similar-looking slides
2. use bullets on every slide
3. have the same background, which may include your institute's logo
4. have a title for each slide

The first three can lead to a very tedious and repetitively visual presentation. There are a limited number of standard backgrounds, and most audiences will have already seen most of them. Try to invent your own background, or if not use a very simple background color.

But the fourth, titles, is very useful. Titles are like a map for the audience guiding them through the presentation.

Having similar looking titles (i.e., same color, font, and font size) throughout the presentation should be enough to give it a sense of cohesion and consistency. This means that you can vary the other three—the look, the use or not of bullets, and have a changing background where appropriate.

7.2 Print as handout then edit

You can generally print up to nine slides on a page—this is called "print as handout." When you see all your slides together like this, it gives you a clearer picture of the amount of text you have used throughout your presentation.

Look at each slide and ask yourself if the text is crucial. If it is not crucial, cut it.

If it is crucial then ask yourself—can I express it in a more succinct way? Could I use a picture rather than text? Do I really need a slide to express this point or could I just say it verbally?

7.3 Only use a slide if it is essential, never read your slides

Next time you watch someone doing a presentation, decide if their slides were

a) specifically designed to help the audience understand the topic
b) simply prompts for the presenter so that he/she wouldn't forget what to say next

The main task of your slides should to be fulfill point (a), and at the same time fulfill point (b).

Try to reduce any overlap between what you say and what your slides "say." The slides do not need to contain everything that you will say—you should never read your slides. You just need a slide for your most important points. And it is your job to draw the audience's attention to why the information on your slide is important.

A slide should only come alive when you actually start commenting on it. Slides should support the talk, not reproduce the talk itself in a written/graphical format.

7.4 Only write what you are 100% sure is correct

If you make mistakes in your English when you talk, the majority of your audience will probably not care or even notice. However, they may notice written mistakes. Don't be creative with your English. Only write what you know is correct. Generally speaking, the shorter the sentence, the less likely you are to make a mistake.

However, the less text you have, the more evident any grammar or spelling mistakes are. These final slides from three different presentations (all real) did not make a good final impression:

End
Thank!
Any question?

The presenters should have written "The end," "Thanks," and "Any questions?"

7.5 One idea per slide

It is very important not to have more than one main idea or result in each slide. Thus any bullets, data, or graphics on the slide should be in support of this main idea. You can check how many ideas there are in your slide by trying to give it a title. If a title doesn't come quickly to mind, it may mean you have covered too many points and thus that you need to divide up these points into further slides.

The moment to give detail is when you are talking through the slide. There shouldn't be too much text/detail within the slide itself.

7.6 Generally speaking, avoid complete sentences

Which is it easier for an audience to do—read or listen? The answer is probably read—it requires much less effort. If you fill your slides with text, you are encouraging your audience simply to read and not to listen to what you say. This habit will

then continue throughout your presentation. At this point you could simply email the audience your paper.

By simplifying and cutting you will have much cleaner slides. The audience will then spend more time listening to you, and less time reading your slides.

Assuming your audience all understand English quite well, if you write complete sentences in your slides

- your audience will read the text on the slide rather than focus on you
- when you comment on the slide it will be difficult for you to avoid repeating word for word what is on your slide. Alternatively, you will be forced to paraphrase, which may lead to unnecessarily long sentences
- your slide will be full of text and to accommodate this text the font may be too small for the audience to read clearly

Moreover, if you have a lot of text on your slides but you say something very different from the text, then the audience has to take in two different sets of information—one written, the other verbal—at the same time. The human brain is not equipped to simultaneously read some information and to listen to something different.

So the solution is to do one of the following:

- cut the slide completely and simply talk
- reduce the text to three or four short bullet points which the audience can absorb immediately. Then expand on one or more of these bullets
- give the audience a few seconds to absorb the text (for example, an important definition or a quotation from an expert), and then blank the screen and start talking

Otherwise there will be two presenters—you and your text—and you will both be competing for the audience's attention.

7.7 Only use complete sentences for a specific purpose

Some audiences, however, appreciate complete sentences. They enable attendees with a low level of English to

- follow your slides, even if they can't follow what you say
- better understand your pronunciation if they can also see the written forms of the key words that you are using
- take notes
- memorize what you have said if they have a better visual memory than auditory memory

Three possible solutions for dealing with an audience with mixed levels of English are

1. have slides with complete sentences but keep them as short as possible, removing all redundancy and removing articles (*the, a/an*). Ways to do this are explained in this chapter. When you show these slides, give the audience up to five to six seconds to read them. Then, make general comments without reading the text. This allows the audience to absorb the information on the slide and then they can concentrate on what you are saying
2. have short bulleted sentences. In addition, prepare photocopies of the same slides but with full text. You can then distribute these to the audience before you begin and the people in the audience with poor English can then refer to them during the presentation
3. give the audience a handout after you have finished, where you can write more complete sentences, and add extra details, e.g., extracts from your paper, your contact details

Even if the audience has a high level of English, complete sentences can occasionally be used to emphasize a particular point, explain a difficult point, or give a quotation.

Again, it is important to remember that you

- should never read your slides, there is absolutely no advantage for either you or the audience, particularly as people read at different speeds and most will not be synchronized with your speech
- don't have to explain everything on your slides—if you have a series of four bullets, you may only need to comment on the first bullet, leaving the audience to interpret the other three
- need to have a variety of slide types. You cannot do what I have suggested in the first solution above (show slide, wait five seconds) throughout the whole presentation, as this will be very tedious for the audience. So try to have some slides with more text, some with less text, and as some with no text at all

7.8 Don't put text in your slides to say what you will do or have done during your presentation

In an outline there is no need to write "*I will discuss the following . . .*" Likewise on the Conclusions slide do not write "*We have presented a strategy for. . .*" In such cases, you simply need to say those phrases.

Imagine you are participating in a project to get more people in your country and surrounding countries to use the Internet. You are at a conference on the Internet, and you are reporting on what you have done so far. Below is the text contained in your first slide:

INTERNET DIFFUSION PROJECT

➢ Several research and technological projects have been activated. I am going to describe the results of the Internet diffusion project.
➢ The main goal of the project is to analyze Internet diffusion among households, companies, nonprofit organizations through the use of domain names.

Ask yourself

- does the audience need to see this information?
- what am I going to say when I show this slide?

The problem is that if you do not practice your presentation, you will not be prepared for the fact that in reality there will be nothing that you can say when you show this slide, apart from repeating what is on it. There is nothing complicated on the slide, no tables, no strange words, no pictures, in fact nothing that the audience would not be able to understand if you simply stood in front of them and told them.

This is the kind of slide that should be cut completely. Instead, when you show your title slide you could say something like this:

> Hi, I am here today to tell you about a completely new project—the first in Eastern Europe in fact. The idea is to find out how much the Internet is being used among various categories of users: households, companies, nonprofit organizations *[you can count on your fingers to highlight each category]*. To do this we are looking at the numbers of Internet domain names by type. My idea is to tell you where we are at the moment. Then it would be great if I could set up contacts with those of you here who represent other Eastern European countries. You might be interested to know that we estimate that there are around 25 million domain names registered in our part of the world and this represents . . ..

7.9 Avoid repeating the title of the slide within the main part of the slide

If the title of your slide is *How to free up space on your disk* don't have a series of bullets introduced by *The following are ways to free up space on your disk:*

7.10 Use only well-known acronyms, abbreviations, contractions, and symbols

In the following examples the shorter versions are in brackets: as soon as possible (asap); to be confirmed (tbc); for example (e.g., or eg), that is to say (i.e., or ie); information (info); against (vs); research and development (R&D); and, also, in addition etc., (& or +); this leads to, consequently (> or =); 10,000 (10 K); 10,000,000 (10 M).

However, don't use abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols unless they are well known. If you explain a new acronym in Slide 2, by Slide 3 the audience will already have forgotten what it means. It is much easier for them to see the full words.

7.11 Choose the shortest forms possible

Use the shortest words and shortest phrases possible. Here are some examples:

regarding = on; however = but; furthermore = also; consequently = so; necessary = needed
We needed to make a comparison of x and y. = We needed to compare x and y.
There is a possibility that X will fail. = X may fail.
Evaluating the component = Evaluating components
The user decides his/her settings = Users decide their settings
The activity of testing is a laborious process = Testing is laborious
No need for the following: = No need for
Various methods can be used to solve this problem such as = Methods:

7.12 Cut brackets containing text

Brackets tend to contain examples, definitions, or statistics.

Natural fibers (wool, cotton etc.,)
ISO (International Organization for Standardization) approval

In the examples above, it is generally not necessary for the audience to see the information in brackets, you can simply say

We analyzed some natural fibers such as wool and cotton.
Our device has been approved by the International Organization for Standardization.

By deleting the parts in brackets, you will thus have extra information to add when you comment on your slide.

7.13 Make good use of the phrase that introduces the bullets

To save space, don't repeat the first words in a series of bullets—either incorporate them into the introductory phrase or simply say them when you make your commentary.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The advantages of using this system are ➢ *it will enable researchers to* limit the time needed in the laboratory ➢ *it will help researchers to* find the data they need ➢ *it will permit researchers to* produce more accurate results	Advantages for researchers: ➢ limits lab time ➢ finds relevant data ➢ produces more accurate results The system enables researchers to ➢ limit lab time ➢ find relevant data ➢ produce more accurate results

In the original example above, the first three words on each bullet (*enable, help,* and *permit*) mean the same in this context.

See Chapter 8 Using bullets

7.14 Avoid references

References to other authors' works, legislation (e.g., EU directives, dates of laws), and manufacturer's instructions are generally not necessary on slides. You may think they give authority to what you are saying, but in most cases they are just distracting and add unnecessary text to your slides.

You might be worried that in the Q&A session someone might ask you for such details, for example if there is some contention about which author made a certain finding. If so, you can create a separate slide showing these details and only show the slide if someone asks the question.

7.15 Keep quotations short

Imagine that you are doing a presentation on Human Rights and you wish to quote what was said by a judge. There is no need to quote the full text. If you do you will force the audience to read it all and probably also force the audience to hear you reading it all. Your choices are either to paraphrase it using your own words; or you can cut the parts (i.e., the parts in *italics* in the original version below) that are not fundamental to an understanding of it, and replace them with three dots (. . .). More drastically, you may decide not to use three dots but tell the audience that you have removed a few words for the sake of space (the full quote could be given in a handout)—this leads to the revised version below, which takes a lot less time for the audience to read and absorb.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
I also concede that the Convention organs have *in this way*, on occasion, reached the limits of *what can be regarded as* treaty interpretation in the legal sense. *At times* they have perhaps even crossed the boundary and entered territory which is no longer that of treaty interpretation but is actually legal policy making. But *this, as I understand it, is not for a court to do; on the contrary,* policy making is a task for the legislature or the Contracting States *themselves, as the case may be.*	The Convention organs have, on occasion, reached the limits of treaty interpretation in the legal sense. They have perhaps even crossed the boundary and entered territory which is no longer that of treaty interpretation but is actually legal policy making. But policy making is a task for the legislature or the Contracting State.

7.16 Deciding what not to cut

If you think that a particular slide, photo, story, or statistic is likely to help you achieve your objective of getting people interested in your work and in you, and of generally making your presentation more entertaining, interesting, and memorable, then don't cut it. But don't keep it just because you personally think it is fun. Try it out on colleagues to test its utility. A presentation with interesting parts, even if less essential than other parts, will be far more digestible than a presentation with only essential parts and nothing interesting.

7.17 When you've finished creating your slides, always check your spelling

When you become very familiar with your slides it becomes almost impossible for you to notice spelling mistakes. It is also pssobile to udnresnatd cmpolteely mssiplet wrods and snteecnes. So this means you may not see the mistakes.

Presentation software does not always manage to highlight incorrect spellings. To check the spelling of your presentation you need to convert the text into your word processing program (e.g., Word, NeoOffice). Before you begin checking or writing, ensure that

- the automatic spell checker is off, otherwise Word (or equivalent) will automatically change the spellings of words that may in fact be correct.
- the language is set only to English (US, UK etc.,) and not to English + your language. Otherwise the program might alter the spellings of English words to conform to how a similar word is spelt in your language

Microsoft Word highlights words that it thinks are not spelled correctly with a red underline. However, given that you probably use a lot of technical words, these too may appear with a red underline because they are not in Word's internal dictionary. It is easy just to ignore these words hoping (or presuming) that you have spelt them correctly. But there is a good chance that at least one of these words will not be spelt correctly. It is a good idea to check on Google or Wikipedia if the spelling is correct or not.

Some of your misspellings of normal words may not be highlighted because they are words that really exist. Some examples are as follows:

> chose vs choice, fell vs felt, form vs from, found vs founded vs funded, led vs leaded, lose vs loose, than vs then, through vs trough, with vs whit, which vs witch

You can find a more complete list of such words, plus a list of US and UK spellings in another book in this series English Usage, Style, and Grammar for Science.

Make sure your spelling is consistently British or American.

Chapter 8
Using Bullets

You will learn how to

- minimize the number of bullets
- be consistent in the use of bullets

Why is this important?

Audiences will potentially see thousands of bullets during a conference. An audience will be more attentive if they believe you have made a special effort for them to make your talk not just useful, but also interesting and entertaining: limiting the number of bullets is a sign of such effort.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_8, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

8.1 Avoid having bullets on every slide

A presentation that is essentially a series of bullets leads to what is humorously known as death by PowerPoint, which in Wikipedia's definition is a criticism of slide-based presentations referring to a state of boredom and fatigue induced by information overload during presentations such as those created by the Microsoft application PowerPoint.

8.2 Choose the most appropriate type of bullet

Always use the standard bullet (•) unless the items

- need to be numbered to show the order or chronology in which something is done
- are in a list of things that were scheduled to be done and have been done. In this case you can use a tick (√).

8.3 Limit yourself to six bullets per slide

When you are giving lists keep them short. Six bullets are generally more than enough. And you only need to talk about a couple of them (e.g., the top two).

An exception is when you are not going to talk about any of the bullets but your aim is simply to show that, for example, your instrument has a lot of features, or that your research group has been involved in a lot of projects. Such features or projects can thus all be preceded by a bullet, or can simply appear as an unbulletted list. In such cases you do not need to read/say anything on the slide.

8.4 Keep to a maximum of two levels of bullets

The slide below has three levels of bullets, which generally leads to messy slides.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
DISCUSSION ➢ Different optimization goals: ○ Save storage ○ Save CPU utilization ▪ Only if multiple applications are being run together	OPTIMIZATION GOALS ➢ Save storage ➢ Save CPU utilization with multiple applications

As you can see from the revised version, you can reduce the bullets to one level by

- changing the title of the slide from *Discussion* to *Optimization Goals*
- incorporating the third level into the second level (*Save CPU use for multiple applications*). Alternatively you could delete the third level and simply give this information verbally

8.5 Do not use a bullet for every line in your text

The default settings of PowerPoint and other applications encourage you to use a bullet before every line of text.

Note how the bullets in the original version below have been misused in this slide from a presentation on detecting faults in a magnet motor.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
MODELING FAULT CONDITIONS ➢ Two main faults are investigated: ➢ Open phase. In this case the current sensor in each phase. ➢ Shorted turns. In this case a percentage of the turns of the winding is shortened. ➢ Under these conditions the faulty . . .	MODELING FAULT CONDITIONS Two main faults are investigated: ➢ Open phase. In this case the current sensor in each phase. ➢ Shorted turns. In this case a percentage of the turns of the winding is shortened. Under these conditions the faulty . . .

The first line (*Two main faults* . . .) introduces a list of two items. So only the second and third lines need bullets. The fourth line is not a *fault*.

8.6 Choose the best order for the bullets

The normal practice is to order the bullets in terms of which ones you will be commenting on. Given that there is generally no need to comment on all the bullets in a list, it is best to put the ones you intend to talk about at the top of the list.

Sometimes you may have a list of bullets and you intend to make one general overall comment about them, without commenting on any of them individually. In such cases it is best to put them in alphabetical order to highlight that they are not in order of importance. Alternatively, you can say, "*By the way these bullets are in no particular order.*"

8.7 Introduce items in a list one at a time only if absolutely necessary

Presentation applications allow you to introduce items in a list one at a time. This can be useful if it is crucial to delay information, for example when giving your conclusions in order to get the audience to focus on one conclusion at a time.

Otherwise, show all the items at once and give the audience three to five seconds to absorb them before you start talking. This means that

- you don't have to keep hitting the mouse to introduce the next item. Your hands are thus free and you can move away from the laptop and keep your eyes focused on the audience

- the audience doesn't have to constantly keep changing where they are looking (you or your slides), and they are not waiting for the next item to appear. They can do all their reading at once
- you won't inadvertently introduce two items at the same time (and thus lose the whole point of delaying the information)

8.8 Use verbs not nouns

Where possible, use verbs both in the introductory sentence and in the bullets themselves. Using verbs, rather than nouns, reduces the number of words you need.

NOUNS	VERBS
Testing is the activity of ➢ The observation and recording of results ➢ The evaluation of the component	Testing involves ➢ Observing and recording results ➢ Evaluating the component

8.9 Be grammatical

Using the least amount of words is generally a good tactic. But what you write has to be grammatical and the words have to be in the right order.

Make sure the first word in each bullet is grammatically the same:

- an infinitive (e.g., *study/to study*)
- an -ing form (e.g., *studying*)
- a verb (e.g., *studies/will study*)
- a noun (e.g., *researcher*)
- an adjective or past participle (e.g., *good, better, improved*)

BAD EXAMPLE (BULLET 1—NOUN; BULLET 2—VERB; BULLET 3—ADJECTIVE)	GOOD EXAMPLE (ALL VERBS)	GOOD EXAMPLE (ALL ADJECTIVES)
Advantages for researchers: ➢ Lab time limited ➢ Finds relevant data ➢ More accurate results	Advantages for researchers: ➢ Limits lab time ➢ Finds relevant data ➢ Produces more accurate results	Advantages for researchers: ➢ Limited lab time ➢ Relevant data ➢ More accurate results

The grammar in the slide in the first column below may initially look correct, but it isn't.

INCORRECT GRAMMAR (DIFFERENT GRAMMATICAL FORMS)	INCORRECT GRAMMAR (ALL NOUNS)	GOOD EXAMPLE (ALL VERBS)
A Java infrastructure for ➢ MPEG-7 features processing ➢ XML database managing ➢ Algorithms ontology exploiting ➢ Functions integrating	A Java infrastructure for ➢ MPEG-7 features processing ➢ XML database management ➢ Algorithms ontology exploitation ➢ Functions integration	A Java infrastructure for ➢ Processing MPEG-7 features ➢ Managing XML database ➢ Exploiting algorithms ontology ➢ Integrating functions

In the first column above, the final word in each bullet ends in -ing, but unfortunately they are not all the same grammatical form. *Processing* can be a verb or a noun, but the other three (*managing, exploiting, integrating*) can only be verbs and cannot be in this position in a phrase. In the second column, there is a series of noun+noun+noun constructions, which is difficult for the audience to understand quickly and is generally not grammatically correct. The best solution is to use verbs, as in the third column.

8.10 Minimize punctuation in bullets

There is no general agreement on how to punctuate bullets. The simplest solution is to use no punctuation at all, and begin each bullet either with a lower case letter or with an upper case letter. The important thing is to use the same style consistently.

Chapter 9
Visual Elements and Fonts

You will learn how to

- keep all visual elements (e.g., photographs, pictures, cartoons, diagrams, graphs, charts, tables) as simple as possible
- use fonts and colors that will be clear on any projector/screen
- avoid constantly looking behind you at the screen to remember what your slide is showing

Why is this important?

Research has shown that of all the information the mind stores, 75% is received visually, 13% through hearing, and 12% through smell, taste, and touch. Visual aids improve learning by 200%, retention by 38%, and understanding complex subjects by 25% to 40%. Visual aids in color get an 85% higher attention span.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_9, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

NB: This book focuses on the language, structural, and oral delivery elements of giving presentations, so this chapter only deals briefly with visual aids.

For websites on this topic see the links on page 165.

9.1 Only include visuals that you intend to talk about

Only show graphs, charts, tables, and diagrams that you will actually talk about. If you don't need to talk about them, you could probably cut them.

9.2 Avoid visuals that force you to look at the screen

A key quality of good presenters is that they spend about 95% of their time looking at the audience. They minimize the moments when they need to look behind to see what is on the screen.

If you talk while looking at the screen you lose audience attention and also your voice is much more difficult to hear.

If your visuals are clear you shouldn't need to look at the screen or point. If you need to point, it means that you need to simplify what is on your slide. Simplification is obviously a benefit for the audience but also for you because it means that you will not get lost or confused in complicated explanations.

The problem with pointing with your hands/fingers, your cursor, or using a laser pointer is that it may be clear to you where you are pointing but it rarely is for the audience. It also means that you will have to turn your back on the audience for several seconds. This can be very distracting for the audience.

9.3 Use visuals to help your audience understand

We tend to enjoy the creative graphical side of preparing a presentation but think less about the actual utility for the audience of what we have created. The aim of visuals is to help your audience to understand, but often they confuse the audience.

To avoid confusion, experts recommend

Type of graph or chart	Useful for	Max. no. elements
Pie	percentages	3–5 slices
Bar charts (horizontal), columns (vertical)	comparisons, correlations, rankings	5–7 bars/columns
Graphs	showing changes over time. Scatter graphs give clear overview of how data are scattered	1–2 lines
Tables	comparing small amounts of information	3 columns and 3 rows
Cartoons	clarifying all kinds of graphs and charts	1–2

In addition, you should

- minimize the amount of information contained
- include labels and legends, and locate them as close as possible to the data points they refer to
- ensure that labels are horizontal, otherwise the audience will find them difficult or impossible to read
- explain what the axes represent and why you chose them
- present comparative information in columns not in rows

You can also use visuals to

- get audience attention
- inject humor
- vary the pace of the presentation

To learn how to comment on graphs etc, see Section 14.2

9.4 Simplify everything

Given that tables and graphs are difficult to interpret quickly, decide if it would be possible to present the same information in a much clearer way.

A sequence of related tables over several slides means that the audience have to remember what was in the previous tables. The best solution is to have all the information on one slide. You can only do this by significantly reducing the amount of information and having a maximum of two adjacent figures.

9.5 Use a photo to replace unnecessary or tedious text

Below is the second slide (the one after the title slide) from a presentation on how to dispose of unused electronic and electric equipment. The title of the slide is EU WEEE Legislation and it is about the directives that the European Union has given on waste disposal.

- ➢ Directive 2002/96/EC of January 27, 2003 on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), subsequently amended by 2003/108/EC
- ➢ Directive 2002/95/EC of January 27, 2003 on the Restriction of certain Hazardous substances (RoHS).
  - o Polluter pays principle extends producers' responsibility to the entire life cycle of electrical and electronic products.
  - o The "old for new" requirement establishes that customers can leave their used items to EEE retailers if new products substituting them are sold

The aim of the presenter should be to reduce the amount of text and thus improve the audience's chances of understanding and remembering. So the questions the presenter should ask himself/herself are as follows: Does the audience really need to know the number of the directives? The exact dates of the directives? When the directives were amended? The names of the directives?

The answer to all these questions is probably "no." Instead, all this information will distract the audience when the presenter comments on the slide.

It would be much easier to replace the slide with some photos of used electronic goods (such as old washing machines, fridges, TVs) by the road or on a rubbish dump. The presenter can then say

> Two European Union directives in 2003 stipulated that producers are responsible for pollution not just during the production process, but also at the end of the life of the product. This means that when you and I buy a new fridge, we can leave our old one with the retailer, rather than dumping it by the side of a road. It is then the producer's responsibility to dispose of our old fridge.

The advantages of this approach are

- once the audience has looked at the photos of dumped fridges, they will focus directly on you, the presenter
- you don't have to "compete" with your slide, because your slide has no text and therefore "says" nothing
- the audience does not have to read through information that they will never remember and in any case do not need to know. If such information on directives really is important, then it would be better to put it in a handout that could be given to the audience at the end of the presentation
- you relate what you say directly to the audience. Everyone in the audience probably has a fridge and everyone knows (or can at least imagine) the problems of disposing of an old one. By involving the audience you can make your point much more strongly. And because they are engaged they will remember more

9.6 Avoid animations

Some features of presentation software often seem to be used solely to impress the audience. Animations are occasionally useful, but they

- may not convert from your laptop to the conference PC
- typically and inexplicably go wrong during the presentation itself
- can be distracting and annoying for the audience
- tend to be used to explain complicated processes. It may be better to just simplify the process—the audience doesn't need to see or understand every step.

9.7 Make sure your slide can be read by the audience in the back row

Audiences will not be pleased if you say, "*I know that this is too small for you to read but* . . ." This generally happens when you paste a figure from your paper directly

into your presentation. This never works. Look at your figure and decide what is the key information that you want your audience to remember. Then start again with a completely new graphic whose sole aim is to show that key piece of info.

If a table or graph is too detailed, it can be distracting and confusing. One solution is to enlarge just one part of it, i.e., the key element you want your audience to understand. If showing the whole table is essential for your purposes, you can show it all in one slide. Then in the next slide show a reduced version but highlighting the interesting part through color, circles, or enlargement.

9.8 Use maps to interest the audience and boost your confidence

Maps are often used in presentations to show the location where your research was carried out, or to show your country of origin, particularly for those people coming from less well-known countries.

Bear in mind that the audience's knowledge of geography will very much depend on where they come from. You may need to use two maps: one to show the big picture (i.e., where your country is in relation to countries that the audience will certainly know the location of) and another bigger map to show where your country/region is.

Maps seem to have a positive psychological effect on presenters. If the presenter is proud of where he/she comes from, he/she becomes animated and passionate when talking about his/her homeland. This elicits a good reaction from the audience and thus boosts the presenter's confidence.

For example, I watched Elena Castenas, a presenter from Visayas State University in the Philippines, begin her presentation with a map of her country, and say the following:

> I come from the world's twelfth most populated country - the Philippines - where about 92 million people live. About a tenth of the population live, like me, abroad. What many of us miss the most is our country's seven thousand one hundred and seven beautiful islands - if you get a chance go there, they are really amazing. So we have the benefits of a truly wonderful archipelago and a mass of natural marine resources, but land resources are very limited. Because of the population pressure, we need to increase crop production by maximizing land utilization through crop diversification for example by intercropping and crop rotation. So in my research I am trying to evaluate the allelopathic potential of grain legumes on corn, rice, and barnyardgrass. By doing this I hope to make a contribution to improving living standards in my country.

This introduction had a very positive effect on the audience because Elena smiled while she was talking (particularly when she said the words *beautiful, amazing* and *wonderful*), and this made her seem both credible and convincing. By giving the exact number of the islands she managed to show not just statistical accuracy but also passion. She also tried to relate directly to the audience (*if you get a chance* . . .). But she wasn't showing the map and talking about her country just for fun: she linked the geography of her country to the topic of her presentation. Her reasons for doing the research were also very convincing—increase crop production

and thus raise living standards. At the same time the audience learned something about one of the world's biggest (but probably not very well known) countries.

9.9 Choose fonts, characters, and sizes with care

The major organizations on the Internet (e.g., Google, Firefox, Amazon, YouTube) use Arial, or a similar font. Research has shown that if you use an easy-to-read font such as Arial or Helvetica, people are more likely to be persuaded about what you are saying.

Comic sans gives the idea of fun and children, and is thus probably not appropriate in a presentation. Presenters sometimes choose it because they think that by doing so they automatically give their presentation a fun element—but it is actually more difficult to read and does not look very professional. Times Roman is possibly the most common font used for writing documents, but it is more difficult to read than fonts like Arial.

If you use a font size smaller than 28 points, the audience may not be able to read your slide. Use 40 points for titles. But avoid putting complete sentences in capital letters. Signs in airports, highways, and metropolitans are all in lower case letters. Why? Because capital letters are much more difficult to understand.

It may be tempting to use lots of formatting because it makes slide preparation seem more creative. However, your text will be easier to read if you limit underlining, italics, shading, and other forms of formatting to the minimum.

9.10 Use color to facilitate audience understanding

Only use color to help audience understand your visuals, not simply to make them look nice. Be consistent with color; use the same color for the same purpose throughout the presentation.

Website designers know that the background of a website can have a significant effect on whether a surfer is likely to stay and look, and possibly buy. This implies that the background color of your slides may also affect how willing the audience will be to spend time looking at them. The experts suggest using dark text such as blue or black on a medium-light, but not bright background, or light colors on a medium-dark background. Dark colors on a dark background are very hard to read.

A lot of people have problems distinguishing red and green (and also, brown/green, blue/black, and blue/purple); so don't use those colors in combination. Avoid red as it has associations with negativity—it is the color often used by teachers to make corrections and in finance it indicates a loss.

If you project your slides you will see how different they look from on your laptop. The audience's ability to see your slides very much depends on the internal and external lighting of the room. If the sun is shining directly onto the screen it makes light colors (particularly yellow) almost impossible to see. Some beamers make red look like blue. Also, bright light considerably reduces the strength of color in photos.

9.11 Choose the most appropriate figure to illustrate your point

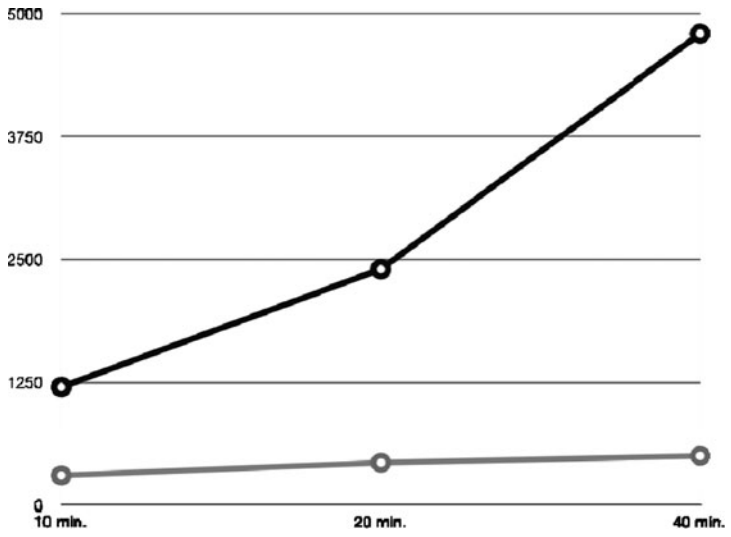
Imagine you want to present the following information:

1. the number of different words used in a presentation does not rise significantly with the length of the presentation
2. this means that even in a long presentation the number of words whose pronunciation you may have to practice does not increase very much.

With regard to point (1), a 10-minute presentation will contain a total of 1200–1800 words, of which 300–450 will be different. The words are "different" in the sense that a presenter may use a total of 300 different words to express himself/herself, but many of these 300 words he/she will use more than once (for example*, an, the, this, then*), which then gives the total number of words (total words). In a 20-minute presentation the "total words" will be twice as many as in a 10-minute presentation, but the percentage of "different words" will only rise slightly from 300–450 to 320–470. Likewise in a 40-minute presentation.

With regard to point (2), only a small number (around 20) of the "different words" will be words that a presenter does not know how to pronounce, as the vast majority of words should already be familiar to the presenter. In addition, this number does not rise significantly with the length of the presentation—for example, in a 20-minute presentation it may only rise from 20 to 22.

Below is a graph that is designed to illustrate the information given above.



The presenter could say

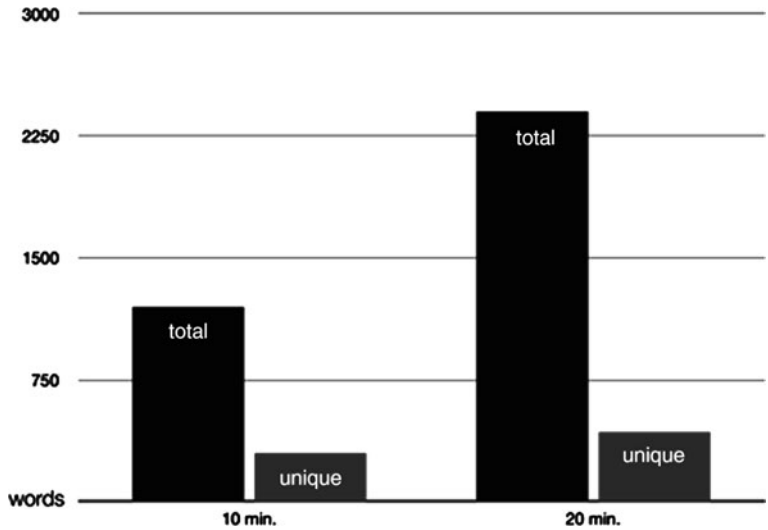
> This graph clearly shows that the total number of words, which is shown in the black line, in a presentation changes in direct relation to the number of minutes of the presentation. On the other hand, the number of different words, which is represented by the gray line, does not increase very much.

However, there are some problems with the graph and the explanation:

- there are no labels, either for the y-axis or for the two lines, so initially the audience will be confused and the presenter is forced to explain what the axes mean
- the most interesting information is contained in the gray line (which represents the total different words), but the way the y-axis has been scaled does not make it clear how many different words are used for each type of presentation
- the audience will be left thinking "what does this all mean?" or "why are you telling me this?"

In fact, there is nothing said about what the connection is with pronunciation (point 2 above), which is supposed to be the key fact that the presenter wants to give to the audience. If you choose the wrong type of illustration, you may find it more difficult to talk about your key points.

The bar chart below shows the same information as in the graph, but perhaps in a more dramatic and immediate way:



But again, there is no connection with pronunciation. In any case, it would be impossible to illustrate the number of words that could create pronunciation problems, because the number would be barely visible as a bar.

Below is a table that a presenter has cut and pasted from a paper

	total: all words	total: different words
10-minute presentation	1200–1800	300–450
20-minute presentation	2400–3600	320–470
40-minute presentation	4800–7200	340–490

There are a few problems with cutting and pasting from papers:

- readers of papers have, in theory, all the time they need to absorb detailed information; in a presentation the audience does not have this time frame
- by having so much information (i.e., the ranges of values and the coverage of three different lengths of presentation), the presenter may be tempted to describe everything, without telling the audience where they should focus. Clearly the more you describe, the longer you take, and potentially the more mistakes in English you will make
- the table in the paper may have been used for a slightly different purpose from what is needed for now—in fact this table tells us nothing about pronunciation

Generally, the best solution is to

- have a really clear idea of what it is that you want the audience to learn about (in this case, the number of words they will have to learn to pronounce)
- choose the minimal amount of data that will clearly convey this idea
- choose the most appropriate format for conveying this idea (the graph and bar chart did not really work well for our purposes in this case)
- use the simplest possible form of this format

So a good solution could be the following table:

	all words	different words	words difficult to pronounce
10 minute	1200	300	10–20
20 minute	2400	320	12–22

This table is quick for the audience to read and absorb. The significance of the very slight rise in the total number of different words is very easy to see. Also, the data on a 40-minute presentation has been removed and just the lower value of the number of words is given.

And it also contains a new column “difficult words to pronounce.” The information given in the second column is interesting, but the key information for someone

who is preparing a presentation and who is worried about pronunciation is in the third column (which does have a range of values, but these are very easy to comprehend immediately).

The result is now that the presenter only gives the audience the information that they really need to know and excludes everything else.

This is what the presenter could say:

> I think that from this table it is clear that the number of different words we use in a presentation only increases slightly from a 10-minute presentation to a 20-minute presentation. The significance of this is in the third column. You don't have to learn the pronunciation of many words. In fact, most of those 300 or 320 different words you will probably already know how to pronounce. This is great news. You just have to learn between 10 and 20 words for a 10-minute presentation. And only a few words more for a presentation that is twice as long.

Note how the presenter

- does not describe the table
- tells the audience where to focus their attention (*the third column*)
- explains the importance of the data
- uses a lot of short sentences—they are easy for the presenter to say, and easy for the audience to understand
- shows enthusiasm (*great news*)

If you were the presenter and you were worried that someone in the audience might question your accuracy, then you could also say,

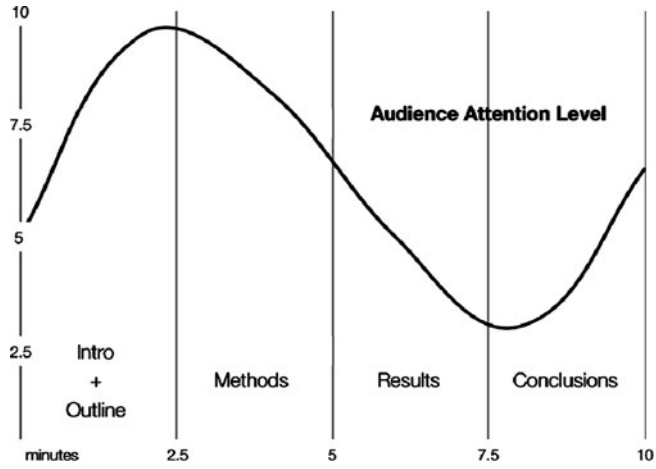
> By the way, the number of words in a presentation obviously varies from presenter to presenter, so someone who speaks very fast may use up to 1800 words. And the number of different words will very much depend on the number of different technical words that a presenter needs. So instead of 300 it could be 450 different words. But in any case the number of different words doesn't rise considerably if you speak for 20 or 40 minutes rather than just 10 minutes.

9.12 Explain graphs in a meaningful way

The statistics that you give the audience (whether your own statistics or those of others) will be very familiar to you, so there is a natural tendency to explain them too quickly and in too much detail. The secret is just to select a few and explain them in a way that the audience can understand.

If the statistics are in the form of a graph, it helps the audience to understand better if you explain what the quantities are on each axis and why you chose them. This gives the data a context and also allows you to add some personal details about how and why you selected them. Obviously, however, if the axes are self-explanatory there is no need to comment on them.

Think about how you might explain and comment on the graph below.



Would this be a helpful commentary for the audience?

> In the graph that can be seen in this slide, which delineates the typical attention curve of an audience during a 10-minute presentation at an international conference, the x-axis of this two-dimensional plot represents the number of minutes, and the y-axis the amount of attention paid by an audience. The graph highlights that at the beginning of a presentation the level of attention is relatively low. Then it rises rapidly, reaching a peak at about two minutes. After approximately three minutes it begins to drop quite rapidly until it reaches its lowest point at around seven minutes thirty seconds. Finally, it rises quite steeply in the ninth minute and reaches a second peak in the last minute.

The problem with the above is that it contains no information that the audience could not have worked out for themselves. Basically all you have done is describe the curve in a rather abstract and tedious way. What you really need to do is to interpret the curve and point out to the audience what lessons can be learned from it. You could say something like this:

> OK, so let's look at the typical attention curve of an audience during a 10-minute presentation. *[Pauses three to five seconds to let audience absorb the information on the graph].* What I'd like you to note is that attention at the beginning is actually quite low. People are sitting down, sending messages on their Blackberry, and so on. This means that you may not want to give your key information in the first 30 seconds simply because the audience may not even hear it. But very quickly afterwards, the audience reach maximum attention. So this is the moment to tell them your most important points. Then, unless you have really captivated them, their attention goes down until a minute from the end when it shoots up again. At least it should shoot up. But only if you signal to the audience that you are coming to an end. So you must signal the ending, otherwise you may miss this opportunity for high-level attention. Given that their attention is going to be relatively high, you need to make sure your conclusions contain the information that you want your audience to remember. So stressing your important points when the audience's attention will naturally be high—basically at the

beginning and end—is crucial. But just as important is to do everything you can to raise the level of attention when you are describing your methodology and results. The best ways to do this are . . .

Note how the presenter

- does not describe the line, but talks about the implications
- does not mention what the x and y axes represent because they are obvious in this case
- highlights for the audience what they need to know
- repeats his/her key points at least twice (i.e., give important information at the beginning and end, signal that you are coming to an end)
- addresses the audience directly by using *you*

Note also how the graph helps the audience to understand which part of the presentation the minutes correspond to. The graph thus shows that audience attention is dropping considerably around the fifth to seventh/eighth minutes, which correspond to when a presenter is normally giving his/her results. Consequently, given that the results are often the most important part of a presentation, the presenter needs to do everything possible to recapture the attention of the audience and ensure that they actually hear the results.

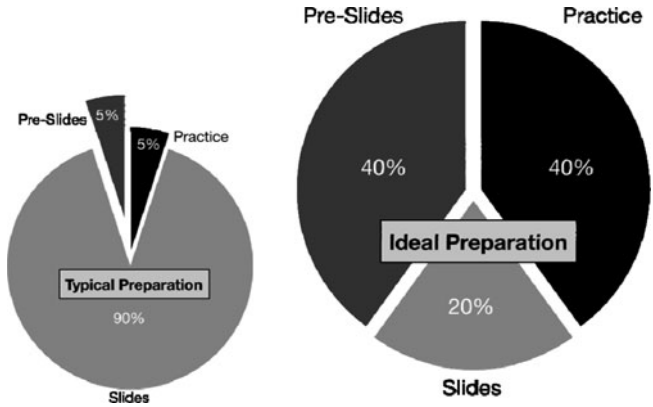
NB: The information on this graph is only a very approximate idea of how much time to spend on each part of a 10-minute presentation. In some cases, your methodology may be much more important/interesting than your results, in which case you will dedicate more time to it.

9.13 Remember the difference in usage between commas and points in numbers

Note how in the graph in 9.12, the minutes have been indicated a decimal point (2.5) rather than with commas (2,5). The international convention is to use the US system of points for decimals (.) and commas (,) for whole numbers. For example, 3.025 is said *three point zero two five* and 3,125 is said *three thousand one hundred and twenty-five*. Ensure you make this change when you convert graphs and tables from a figure or text written in your own language into an English version.

9.14 Design pie charts so that the audience can immediately understand them

The two pie charts below represent the percentages of time spent on three aspects of preparing a presentation.



The secret to pie charts is not to have too many slices. Given that in the first chapter of this book I outlined 10 stages for preparing a presentation, there could have been 10 slices in the pie. But 10 slices would be hard for the audience to decipher on the slide and difficult for the presenter to explain. Plus it would be almost impossible to put clear labels on each slice. In any case, you can always tell your audience that you have considerably simplified the chart, and that if they are interested in seeing the full version they can see it in your paper, on your website, etc.

Notice how the two pie charts are not the same size. This tells the audience that the second chart is the one they should give the most attention to.

If you do reduce a pie chart to its most important elements, it will be easy for the audience to understand immediately. It will also require minimal comment by you, as highlighted by the revised version below:

ORIGINAL	REVISED
In the next slide we can see a comparison between the typical practice of presenters during their preparation of a presentation and the ideal practice. Pre-slide preparation in the normal practice is allocated 5% of the time in comparison with 40% in the ideal time. On the other hand, in the normal practice 90% of the presenter's time is dedicated to slide creation . . . (63 words)	I think these pie charts are self-explanatory. People spend too much time on designing slides, rather than preparing what they want to say and then practicing it. (27 words)

Note how in the original version above, the presenter gives no extra useful information—it is merely a tedious description of the information contained on the chart. The revised version simply limits itself to interpreting the data.

An alternative to the above pie charts is not to have a slide at all. You could simply walk to the whiteboard and write 90 and 20% in large characters. You then say to the audience,

> If you are like most presenters, you probably spend about 90% of your time preparing your slides. This leaves you only 10% to think about what you will actually say and to practice saying it. The result is often very poor presentations. Instead you should reduce the slide preparation time to 20% and use the other 80% of the time for deciding exactly what to say and then how to say it. (72 words)

Note how the presenter directly addresses the audience using *you* (rather than saying "*Typically presenters spend about 90% of their time preparing their slides*"). This alternative is useful if you already have lots of figures in your presentation and so it provides variety. Also, it immediately attracts the audience's attention if you walk over to the whiteboard. However, it does mean that you will have to spend more words explaining everything (72 words rather than 27).

So another alternative is to reproduce the pie chart on the whiteboard—which should not take more than about 10 seconds—and then give you explanation as in the revised version above.

The moral of the story is to always think about the most audience-oriented and quickest way to present information. In the case above, a pie chart (whether as a slide or on a whiteboard) is the quickest, easiest, and most effective way for you to convey information to the audience.

What all the figures in 9.11, 9.12, and 9.14 highlight is that the easier a figure is to understand, the less time you will have to spend on explaining it. Likewise, the more complex it is, the more difficult it will be for you to explain—and the consequence will be that you will be less relaxed and therefore more likely to confuse the audience and make mistakes in your English.

Please note that all the information presented in these figures is only very approximate and is based purely on my personal observations.

Chapter 10
Getting and Keeping the Audience's Attention

You will learn how to

- attract and retain your audience's attention throughout your presentation
- understand when audience attention is at its highest and lowest

Why is this important?

According to the presentations expert Shay McConnon, *Juries typically remember only 60% of what they are told. Why? The case is not about them. No matter how hard they try, people have difficulty paying attention to presentations that aren't about them.*

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_10, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

10.1 Gain and keep your audience's attention

Below is a summary of the first nine chapters of this book in terms of how you can attract and hold your audience's attention:

1. have a clear idea who your audience are, don't assume that they are naturally going to be interested in your topic
2. have an agenda and a clear structure with clear transitions so that the audience know where you are going
3. make it easy for the audience to follow you and your slides
4. help the audience to understand why you are showing them a particular slide
5. involve your audience and give them lots of examples
6. make frequent eye contact
7. avoid too much text on your slides
8. use simple graphs and tables
9. make your text and visuals big enough for everyone in the audience to see clearly
10. avoid entering into too much detail (i.e., just select those things that the audience really need to know about the topic)
11. avoid spending more than a couple of minutes on one specific detail
12. have a variety of types of slides (not just all bullets, or all text, or all photos)
13. speak reasonably slowly and move from slide to slide at a speed that the audience will feel comfortable with
14. sound interested and enthusiastic about your topic
15. vary your tone of voice
16. inject some humor
17. move around occasionally rather than being static

10.2 Exploit moments of high audience attention

Audiences tend to remember things that are said at the beginning and end of a presentation, because their attention is generally high at these points.

They also remember things that they hear more than once.

And finally they remember curious facts, things that stand out.

Ideally you need to state your key points both at the beginning and ending. In the middle go through each key point more in detail. If possible, include an unexpected/counterintuitive/interesting fact for each key point. Try juxtaposing data with quotations, and serious issues with a humorous anecdote.

The point of your presentation is to disseminate information and engage interest for your project. If your audience do not listen, then there is no point in you doing the presentation. So, most ways of getting and maintaining their attention are legitimate provided that they

- are relevant, or in any case interesting and memorable
- do not offend anyone

10.3 Don't spend too long on one slide

Our attention span is affected by how long we look at something that does not change. Research has shown that we can only look at something static for 30 seconds and then we start thinking about something else. So if possible, reduce the amount of time you spend showing the same slide. For example, you could show the slide, explain what you need to explain with the aid of the slide, and then blank it (see Section 10.7) and carry on talking.

10.4 Maintain eye contact with the audience

If you don't make eye contact with all your audience throughout the duration of your presentation, they will quickly start thinking about other things.

You can only maintain eye contact with the audience if

- you know exactly what you are saying—if you are not sure what you are going to say next, you will probably start looking up at the ceiling or down at the floor
- your slides are simple—if they are complex you will be very tempted to turn your back to the audience to remember the information on the slide

10.5 Be aware of the implications of the time when your presentation is scheduled

There are clearly good times and bad times in the conference schedule for presenters to give their talks. What are known as the "graveyard slots" (i.e., the worst/dead times) take place

- when attendees would probably rather be having lunch (attendees may focus more on their stomach than on you)
- at the end of the day (the audience have probably assimilated all the information they are capable of assimilating in 1 day)
- at the end of the last day (the worst possible slot, when attendance is always low)

If you have been allocated one of the above slots, you will need to make a special effort to gain and keep the audience's attention. You can do this by

- being a little more informal
- understanding that the audience will be unable to assimilate much new information—therefore consider reducing the number of points you intend to cover and the amount of detail you give
- finishing early and on a high note—the audience will thus go away with a positive impression of you

ADVANCED TIPS

10.6 Quickly establish your credibility

How the audience judge your credibility will determine the success of your presentation. Even if your slides are fantastic, and your results seem good, the audience will not give you their full attention if they do not feel you are credible i.e., if they cannot fully believe or agree with what you are saying.

How do you establish your credibility? It is helpful if you tell the audience something about your knowledge and experience with the topic, and also why you are interested in it.

10.7 Learn ways to regain audience attention after you have lost it

When you are doing your presentation you may be competing for the audience's attention with one or more of the following:

- their mobile phone or laptop—they may be text messaging or emailing
- the person sitting next to them may want to chat
- things happening outside the window
- their hunger (particularly at the end of the morning session)
- their boredom—yours may be the sixth, seventh, or even eighth presentation that they have seen that day

These kinds of distractions do not always depend on the level of interest of your presentation. In any case, you have to try and regain their attention. You can do this by

- blanking the screen (on PowerPoint you can do this using the B key)
- using the whiteboard—inevitably the audience will want to know what you are going to write. Make sure you write large enough for all the audience to see—this generally means writing very little or only drawing simple diagrams. Make sure you move to the side of the whiteboard so that the audience can see what you are writing/have written
- asking the audience a rhetorical question. Try and predict what kind of questions the audience might be asking themselves at this point of your presentation. Pause. Ask the question. Pause again. Then answer it
- giving the audience a statistic. People are fascinated by numbers and they help the audience see the dimension of the situation. See 10.8 on how to present statistics

- saying "*here's something you might be interested in seeing*" or "*I've brought along something to show you* . . ." and producing an object from your pocket, bag, etc. Your audience will be immediately curious to see what the object is. Again it has to be big enough for everyone to see, or you have to have lots of them to distribute among the audience—but be careful as they may turn into an even bigger distraction! Objects can also be a good substitute for explanations
- showing an unusual slide—this could simply be a slide that breaks with the normal pattern of your other slides. It could be an interesting photo, a clear and effective diagram, or contain a number, a short quotation, or a question

10.8 Present statistics in a way that the audience can relate to them

Compare these ways of stating the same statistics.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
A bird's eye and a human's eye take up about 50 and 5% of their heads, respectively. In our study of the importance of vision in birds of prey, we found that this factor was . . .	A bird's eye is huge. It takes up about 50% of its head. Half its head. That's 10 times more space than a human's eye takes up. In fact, to be comparable to the eyes of a bird of prey, such as an eagle, our eyes would have to be the size of a tennis ball. When we studied eagles, vultures, and buzzards, we realized that . . .

Note how in the revised version, the speaker gives the same information twice—50% and *half*. This is useful because it is very difficult to distinguish between the sound of *fifteen* and *fifty* (likewise between 13 and 30, 14 and 40, etc). By using the analogy of a tennis ball, the audience gets a much clearer idea of the proportions. Clearly, to be effective it would be helpful to have slides of an eagle's head and a tennis ball, and maybe a cartoon of a person with tennis ball eyes. Also, you would be guaranteed attention if you pulled two tennis balls out of your pockets!

For more on statistics, see Sections 11.2, 11.3, and 11.4

10.9 Be aware of cultural differences

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell, a writer at *The New Yorker* magazine and named as one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People, talks about cultural

differences in the way we communicate and receive information. In Chapter 8 he makes three very interesting points:

1. many Asian countries are "receiver oriented," this means it is the listener's task to interpret what the speaker is saying
2. the Japanese have much higher levels of "persistence" than Americans. This means that the Japanese can stick to a task for much longer than their American counterparts—they have higher levels of concentration
3. our memory span is correlated to the time it takes in our language to pronounce numbers. Because the words for numbers in Asian languages are quicker to pronounce and are more logical (*ten-one* rather than *eleven*), Asians tend to be able to absorb numbers and make calculations generally far more quickly than those in the West

What he writes has huge implications for presentations. It means that if you are talking to an audience that includes a good number of people from the West (particularly the United States and Great Britain), you should try to

1. work very hard yourself to make it absolutely clear what you are saying, so that it is effortless for the audience to understand
2. be aware that your audience may not be used to concentrating for long periods and may thus have a short attention span
3. give the audience time to absorb and understand any numbers and statistics that you give them

10.10 Be serious and have fun

Attendees at my courses are often skeptical when I say that audiences are more receptive if they enjoy themselves—my students don't doubt the truth of this, but they think that it is not professional and that their professors would not approve. However, many of the world's top professors do approve.

Professor Chandler Davis, the mathematician and well-seasoned conference attendee, told me,

> Some of us can't help expressing our joy in knowing the facts, particularly those WE discovered; presenters who don't naturally impart the joy should be roused to doing so.

And Nobel Prize Winner in Chemistry in 2008, Professor Martin Chalfie, confirmed that

> A professional presentation can be both serious AND fun.

Another professor, psychologist Thomas Gilovich from Cornell University, states that

> Our appetite for entertainment is enormous . . . If the listener comes away from the communication either informed or entertained, the interaction has been worthy of his or her time and attention, and the speaker has met one of his or her most basic requirements.

Being entertaining doesn't necessarily mean making people laugh. It means

- occasionally providing standard information in a novel or unusual way
- using examples that your audience can easily relate to
- finding interesting and surprising statistics
- using very simple but unusual graphs and pictures that underline important points in a new way

In any case you may decide to provide a few humorous slides or anecdotes. You can then try one and see what reaction you get from your audience. If it works well you can use the others. If not, skip them.

Be careful about telling jokes. They may be dangerous, as the joke may

- not be understood
- be offensive or inappropriate for the culture of your audience
- be completely irrelevant to the topic of the presentation

Part III
What to Say and Do at Each Stage of the Presentation

A good presentation of a paper can be a delightful experience, an elegant performance, a memorable show for its audience. During the course of my scientific career I have seen thousands of presentations. Most go into oblivion at once, but some stay in the memory for a lifetime. There's no doubt about it: good speaking skills are more important than dazzling PowerPoint slides.

Osmo Pekonen, Finnish author and mathematician

Chapter 11
Ten Ways to Begin a Presentation

You will learn how to

- immediately gain the attention of your audience
- connect with the audience by adopting a less formal style

Why is this important?

How you introduce yourself and how the audience react to your introduction determine at least 30% of the success of your presentation. Audiences form their impressions of a presenter within approximately 90 seconds, after which it is difficult to change their opinion.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_11, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

Many of the best presentations, or certainly the most enjoyable ones, are those where the presenter simply chats to the audience and tries to connect with them immediately. You can do this by using one or more of the following techniques:

1. say what you plan to do in your presentation and why
2. tell the audience some general facts about where you come from
3. give an interesting statistic that relates to your country
4. give an interesting statistic that relates directly to the audience
5. get the audience to imagine situations
6. ask the audience a question or get them to raise their hands
7. say something personal about yourself
8. mention something topical
9. say something counterintuitive
10. get the audience to do something

If you are an inexperienced presenter the easiest introduction is number 1, and 2–3 are also not difficult to manage. The introductions described in points 4–10 are advanced tips and require more confidence and creativity. They are worth trying because they deviate from what the average non-native speaker does and thus tend to attract audience attention.

Whichever beginning you chose, when you get up try to smile and keep your eyes on the audience—don't look up at the ceiling or down at the floor as this gives the impression that you can't remember what to say. Have a quick glance (look) at your notes, rather than looking behind you to remember what is on your slide. Audiences like positive enthusiastic presenters, so don't joke or say anything negative about the location of the congress, the organization, or about the local people, and the local infrastructure. This may amuse some members of the audience but alienate others—particularly those who live locally.

11.1 Say what you plan to do in your presentation and why

A good standard introduction while showing your title slide is to say some or all of the following:

- what hypotheses you wanted to test
- why you chose this particular method for testing them
- what you achieved
- what impact this might have on your field

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Hello everyone and thank you for coming. First of all I'd like to introduce myself, my name is Ksenija Bartolić. As you can see, the title of my presentation is *Innovative Methods of Candidate Selection in Industry*. I work in a small research group at the University of Zagreb in Croatia. We are trying to investigate the best way to select candidates for a job and we hope our research will be useful not just in the field of psychology but also for human resources managers in general.	Hello, I am here to talk about a new way to select candidates for a position in a company. I'd like to tell you three things. First, why I think the current methods for selecting candidates are not effective. Second, my radical alternative, which is to let the receptionist of the company make the decision. And third, how trials proved that even against my own expectations this solution reduced recruitment costs by 500%. Moreover, it was as effective as traditional interviews in more than 90% of cases. I believe that human resources managers . . .

Both versions are perfectly acceptable. Both are clear and reasonably succinct and you can obviously choose the one you feel most natural/confident with. The revised version has the following advantages:

- it avoids giving information that can be easily deduced from the title slide (i.e., the name of the presenter and the title of the presentation)
- it immediately tells the audience what they can expect to hear, without having to show an outline slide
- it covers the main messages of the presentation
- it includes the main result of the research at a point in the presentation where audience attention is likely to be high—the audience doesn't have to wait to the end of the presentation to hear what the outcome of the research was

However, the original version also has an advantage. By delaying important information (i.e., the overview of what the presenter is planning to say) it gives the audience a few moments to settle into their seats and tune in to your voice. Even if the audience are not listening or concentrating, and even if they have an initial problem with the presenter's accent or voice level, they will still be in a position to follow the rest of the presentation. So the revised version is good provided that the audience are already focused on you, which is generally the case if you are not the first presenter of a particular session.

The other nine beginnings outlined below are designed to immediately attract audience attention, but delaying key information by 30 seconds to a couple of minutes on the basis that the audience are not generally at their most alert during the first 60 to 90 seconds. The advantage of such introductions is that understanding the rest of the presentation does not hinge (depend) on the audience hearing and absorbing every word.

Note: The "original" versions are perfectly acceptable but are generally less effective in attracting audience attention than the "revised" versions.

11.2 Tell the audience some facts about where you come from

Audiences are often interested in learning new information about countries that they are not familiar with. For example, if you are at a conference in Europe or North America, and you are from a country outside these areas, then exploit your uniqueness and tell the audience something about your country. However this information should not last more than 30 seconds. Also, it must be clear to the audience that there is some connection with the topic of your research.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Good afternoon everyone, my name is Cristiane Rocha Andrade and I am a PhD student at the Federal University of Paraná in Brazil. I am here to give you a presentation on some research I have been conducting on allergies to cosmetics and to propose a way to use natural cosmetics.	I come from Brazil. It took me 30 hours to travel the 9189 km to get here, so please pay attention! In Brazil we have two big forests, the Amazonian and the Atlantic with around 56,000 species of plants. More than 90% of these species have not been studied yet. This is why I decided to study natural cosmetics with raw materials from Brazil.

In the revised version, Cristiane cleverly gets the audience to pay attention, by explicitly telling them to do so (but in a humorous way). She uses many numbers, including the exact number of kilometers between her home town in Brazil and the location of the conference. She could have said "about 10,000 km" but that would not have had the same dramatic and humorous effective. She then connects where she comes from with the aim of her studies.

For another example using maps, see Section 9.8

11.3 Give an interesting statistic that relates to your country

Imagine that you are studying how soil erosion affects farmers and food production in your country. A typical but not very interesting way to start would be

> Today I am going to present some results on the problem of soil erosion and how it affects food production in my country.

But you could begin much more dramatically with a statistic:

> Ten thousand tons of soil are lost through erosion in my country every year. This means that fertility is lost and desertification ensues.

Or you could begin in a much more personal way:

> Two months ago I went home and saw the devastation caused by the floods [shows picture of floods]. I have an uncle whose land has been almost completely eroded. This means that his crops will fail this year. So why is this a problem? It means that in the world today . . .

Another possible beginning of the same presentation could have been to say, "*In my country 30 tons of soil per hectare is lost due to rain every year.*"

But the problem is that 30 tons of soil are not something your audience can easily visualize. However, if you say, "*Imagine if this room was filled with soil. Well, after a single rainstorm on a small field in my country, three quarters of the soil would have disappeared*." In this case you are giving the audience a statistic that they can relate to. It may not be completely accurate, but it is accurate enough for them to see that you are talking about a catastrophe. If you then say what the consequences would be if this process isn't stopped, again using something the audience can relate to (*the equivalent of Iceland would disappear in less than a year*), then you will have a captivated audience.

For more on statistics, see Sections 10.8 and 14.2

11.4 Give an interesting statistic that relates directly to the audience

A very effective introduction is to show the title slide while the audience is coming in. Then when it is time to start, blank the screen and tell the audience a fundamental and recent statistic in your field or a key result in your research. After giving your statistic, you introduce yourself and say why the statistic relates to what you are going to tell the audience.

Of course, you know why you are mentioning a certain statistic and the relevance that it has, but the audience might not. Help them make the connection. If possible use statistics that they can relate to their personal experience or that they can easily understand or visualize.

Your statistics need to relate to your audience's capacity to understand them. Which of these statistics do you find easier to understand/visualize or has the greatest impact on you?

1. 73 million papers have been completed in the last 10 years.
2. Last year 7,300,000 papers were completed.
3. Every day 20,000 scientific papers are completed.
4. 14 papers are completed every minute.
5. In the 10 minutes that I have been talking to you this morning 140 papers will have been completed around the world.

6. Hands up those of you who have finished writing a paper in the last seven days. Well around the world, in the last week about 140,000 papers will have been produced, that's an incredible 14 papers every minute.
7. By the year 2050 800 million papers will have been written, that's enough paper to fill this conference room 33,000 times.

Statistic 1 is probably too high for audiences to comprehend—if possible reduce statistics from millions, billions, and trillions to something more manageable. Statistics 2-4 are all fine, but they lack impact. Statistic 5 is more interesting because the timescale is now (the very moment that the presenter speaks), rather than a generic day or year. Statistic 6 directly involves the audience and motivates them to listen to the answer. Statistic 7 makes an unusual comparison to physical space.

11.5 Get the audience to imagine a situation

Without introducing yourself or the topic of your presentation, make your first word of your presentation "Suppose . . .." and then give the audience a hypothetical situation which relates both to the audience and to the topic of your research.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
My name is Minhaz-Ul Haque and the title of my presentation is Using Protein from Whey-coated Plastic Films to Replace Expensive Polymers. As you can see in this outline slide, I will first introduce the topic of . . .	Suppose everyone in this room had brought with them today all the food packaging that they had thrown away in the last year. I have counted about 60 people here. Given that the average person consumes 50 kilos of food packaging a year, then that is three tons of packaging. Over the next 4 days of this conference, we will produce about 450 kilos of packaging, including plastic bottles. My research is aimed at increasing the recyclability of this packaging by 75%. How will we do it? Using protein from whey-coated plastic films to replace expensive polymers. My name is Minhaz-Ul Haque and . . .

11.6 Ask the audience a question/Get the audience to raise their hands

An effective way to start a presentation is to get the audience to think about a question. If you use this technique, ask your questions, wait for a maximum of two seconds, and then continue.

For example, imagine you are at a conference on rare diseases. There is little point in beginning your presentation by showing your audience a slide with the following definition:

> Rare Diseases are a heterogeneous group of serious and chronic disorders having a social burden.

Your audience will probably already know what a rare disease is. Instead you need to tell them something they don't know and something that will attract their interest. So, cut the text completely and write the following on the whiteboard (but have a slide as a backup in case there is no whiteboard):

1:50,000
1:2,000

The audience will be immediately curious to know what the numbers refer to. This is what you could say:

> Do you know anyone who has a rare disease? *[Two second pause]* Well if you are from the United Kingdom, the chances are that you don't. But if you are from Spain, then you might know someone who does have a rare disease. Does that mean that here in Spain we have more rare diseases? No, it simply means that our definition of what constitutes a rare disease is different from that in the UK. A rare disease in the UK is something that affects 1 in 50,000 people. In Spain we follow the European Union definition of 1 in 2,000. That's a very big difference. Well, my research group has been looking at . . .

The technique is to immediately tell the audience something that they may not know, rather than giving them an abstract definition of something they already know. Notice that each sentence is short—this makes the sentences easy for you to say and easy for the audience to understand. The two-second pause after asking the question may seem like a long time to you (when you are on the podium) but for the audience it is a chance to think about the question you have just asked, and to them it doesn't seem long at all.

An alternative to asking a question is to get the audience to raise their hands in response. As with the question technique, give the instruction (hands up if/raise your hands if), then wait for a maximum of two seconds before you continue.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Hello everyone, I am Rossella Mattera, a PhD student in Molecular Medicine. I am here today to tell you about the ExPEC project, in particular about a vaccine against ExPEC. What is ExPEC? ExPEC or extra-intestinal pathogenic Escherichia coli, is a microorganism that causes a large spectrum of diseases associated with a high risk of death. The commonest extra-intestinal E.coli infection that is caused by these strains is cystitis, in fact 80% of women have this "experience" during their lifetime, with a reinfection in less than 6 months. . .	Hands up the men who have had cystitis. *[Pause]* I bet many of the men here don't even know what cystitis is *[said in jokey tone].* In this room there are 20 women and 16 of you women will experience cystitis during your lifetime. You men are lucky because cystitis mainly affects women. It is a horrible infection that makes you feel you want to go to the toilet every two or three minutes. Cystitis is caused by ExPEC or extra-intestinal pathogenic Escherichia coli. This infection affects 80% of women. Cystitis, pyelonephritis, sepsis, and neonatal meningitis are common infections caused by these strains. Most ExPECs are resistant to the antibiotic therapy, therefore we need a vaccine. I am a PhD student in Molecular Medicine. I am here today to tell you about a vaccine against ExPECs.

11.7 Say something personal about yourself

Tell an anecdote about yourself—how you first became interested in the topic, what you particularly like about this area of research, where you work, and what is special about it, a particular event that took place during the research, for example an unexpected problem, a counterintuitive result. Show the audience your enthusiasm for the topic—tell them what amazes and excites you about your research. When you talk about your passion for your work your face will automatically light up and you voice will be animated—the audience will thus be more engaged.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
I am going to describe the creation of strawberries with a strong consistency in the pulp. In our research we modified strawberry plants with agrobacterium and we obtained 41 independent transgenic plants. On the basis of yield and fruits firmness, we then selected six different varieties of strawberry.	I became interested in agronomy and biosciences completely by accident. One summer holiday while I was a student I was working in an organic ice cream shop. Every day we got crates of fresh fruit, and every day we had to throw away kilos of strawberries because the ones at the bottom were completely squashed and had already started to mold. The pears, on the other hand, were always fine. So I thought, what if we could mix the succulent look and delicious taste of a strawberry with the strong consistency of the pulp in a pear?

In the original version, the presenter launches into her topic without giving the audience time to switch their brains on. If the audience miss what she says now, their understanding of what she says later may be impeded. In the second version, she answers a question that many people have—how did someone choose to do the job they do? The audience enjoy comparing their experiences with that of the presenters.

Here is a true story told by Professor Maria Skyllas-Kazacos from the University of New South Wales, of how she became a chemical engineer.

> One of the choices in the industrial chemistry degree, I think when you got to the third year, was whether to do the mainstream industrial chemistry subjects or to do polymer science. A friend a year above me said, "Oh, you should do the polymers. Polymers is a really big, important industry." So I decided to try polymers. I went along to the first class—only five or six of us had chosen this, and I was the one girl—in a polymer engineering laboratory. The lecturer started to talk about grinding and milling and adding carbon black to rubbers, and he said, "When you come in the lab, you've got to wear dirty clothes because we use a lot of carbon black in here and you're going to get covered in it. And tie your hair all the way back and make sure it's all covered, because any loose hair can get jammed in the machine and you'll be scalped." I had very long hair! A friend told me later that this lecturer did not want girls in the lab and deliberately went out of his way to scare me off doing polymer engineering—and he succeeded—I dropped polymer engineering immediately and took up the industrial chemistry option instead.

Note how she

- uses colloquial language and sounds like she is talking to a friend
- gives interesting details
- quotes from other people (i.e., uses their words)
- mixes long sentences with short ones
- obviously enjoys telling this story

11.8 Mention something topical

Try to relate your beginning to something that is already in the audience's mind, a recent news story or something connected to the conference.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
My name is Horazio Perez and I work at the Center for Transportation Research in . . . In my presentation today I would like to tell you the results of an experimental study on real time bus arrival time prediction using GPS data.	I know that a lot of you, like me, have been getting to the conference each day by bus. I don't know about you, but I have had to wait about 10 to 15 minutes each time. And it's been great fun. In fact, not only have the buses been late, but as soon as one comes, then another two quickly follow. And that's made me even happier. Why? Because my research is investigating why this happens—why do buses come in threes? And if it happens here in Geneva, where Rolex have their headquarters, then clearly no one else has solved the problem yet, and I am going to get in there first. My name is Horazio Perez and . . .

Horazio takes a very banal situation, catching a bus, and relates it both to the audience's experience and the topic of his research. He also adds an element of suspense by talking about "fun" and "happy" in a situation which for most people would simply be frustrating. By doing this he attracts and holds the audience's attention.

11.9 Say something counterintuitive

People like to have their views challenged, as long as these views are not related to things they feel very strongly about such as religion, ethics, and politics. If your research has proved something that goes against commonly held opinion, then this is a perfect opportunity to gain the audience's attention.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
In this presentation a comparative analysis will be made of some investigations into the proficiency in the use of the English language on a world scale. The parameters and methodology used to make the analysis, along with some of the results will be presented. I will begin by giving a brief overview of the background . . .	Who speaks and writes the best English in the world? The British maybe, *[Pause]* after all they have the Queen, and that's where the language originated? *[Pause]* Or do you think it's the Americans? Or the Canadians or Australians? *[Pause]* Actually it's the Scandinavians, the Danes, and the Dutch. And if you have been attending most of the presentations here in the last few days, I guess it's these guys who you understood the best. Does this mean that the native English speakers can't even speak their own language? Of course not. But . . .

11.10 Get the audience to do something

Author Bjørn Lomborg, an expert on global problems and one of the world's top 75 most influential people (Esquire magazine), began a presentation for TED.com by saying

> What are the big problems in the world? And I must say, before I go on, I should ask every one of you to try and get out pen and paper because I'm actually going to ask you to help me to look at how we do that. So get out your pen and paper. The bottom line is, there is a lot of problems out there in the world. I'm just going to list some of them. There are 800 million people starving. There's a billion people without clean drinking water. Two billion people without sanitation. There are several million people dying of HIV and AIDS. The lists go on and on. There's two billions of people who will be severely affected by climate change—so on. There are many, many problems out there.
>
> In an ideal world, we would solve them all, but we don't. We don't actually solve all problems. And if we do not, the question I think we need to ask ourselves—and that's why it's on the economy session—is to say, if we don't do all things, we really have to start asking ourselves, which ones should we solve first? And that's the question I'd like to ask you. If we had say, 50 billion dollars over the next four years to spend to do good in this world, where should we spend it?

He then got the audience to work together for 30 seconds to think about 10 of the biggest challenges in the world and to prioritize solutions to these problems. His technique was not just to present statistics but also to gain the audience's attention and involve them directly. This meant that they really felt involved and were thus more motivated to hear his solutions.

Getting the audience to do something active, rather than just sitting there passively, has several advantages:

- it gives you time to settle your nerves
- it gives the audience a nice break from the usual run of back-to-back presentations

- it normally generates a lot of interest, particularly if you have a terrible time slot for your presentation, such as at the end of a session

I have mentioned a lot of techniques for opening a presentation. Your instinctive reactions while reading them were probably as follows:

1. yes, most are better than traditional beginnings
2. but no, I could never have the confidence do that

There is absolutely no reason why you can't use such techniques. I have had students who had never given a presentation before, and who are even quite timid, who managed to create beginnings like the ones outlined above. It does require a little courage. But only a little. Yet the result is fantastic. The audience appreciate it and when you see their positive reaction it makes you feel good and boosts your confidence. The result is that you deliver a better presentation.

The secret is to experiment. Try adapting your topic to one or more of the ways outlined above. Be creative. Have fun. And keep trying until you find the best approach. But before using it at the conference, test it out on colleagues to make sure that it gets the reaction you hoped for.

The more fun you have preparing your presentation, the more fun you will have when you give the presentation, and the more fun the audience will have listening to you.

It is fundamental to connect with the audience. If you don't connect with them, they will not give you the attention you deserve. This is particularly true if your presentation is scheduled just before lunch, after lunch, or at the end of the day, i.e., at times of the day when the audience's attention is very low.

Finally, it is not only at the beginning of your presentation that you can use these techniques. They are also excellent ways of regaining attention later in the presentation.

Chapter 12
Outline and Transitions

You will learn how to

- move from your first slide into the main part of the presentation
- introduce each new section and thus highlight the logical structure of your presentation

Why is this important?

Although the logic of your presentation is clear to you, it won't necessarily be clear to your audience. Using the right transition phrase will help to guide your listeners.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
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12.1 Consider not having an "Outline" slide

Scientific presentations tend to follow the same structure—introduction, method, results, discussion. Unless you intend to radically deviate from this structure then you do not necessarily need to use an outline slide as a transition into the main part of the presentation.

A poor outline slide like the ones below is a signal to the audience that they will hear the same old things again.

OUTLINE

➢ Introduction
➢ Methodology
➢ Results
➢ Conclusions

AGENDA

➢ Overview
➢ Aims and purposes
➢ Theoretical framework
➢ Research methods
➢ Empirical analysis

The slides above simply tell the audience that your presentation follows the standard procedure and that surprises are highly unlikely. They are a series of abstract words that act as an invitation for the audience to go to sleep—the slides give no information to the audience that they could not have imagined or guessed for themselves. It also encourages the presenter to say things that add no information for the audience (see original version below which refers to the first outline slide above). However although you do not need to show the audience a slide like this, you do need to tell your audience verbally what you plan to do, i.e., your main messages. But you need to do this in a way that really gives them useful information that will help them to understand the context and structure of your presentation (as in revised version).

ORIGINAL	REVISED
First I will give you a brief introduction to my work. Then I will outline the reasons that led me to conducting this research. Next I will explain my methodology before discussing my results.	First, I'd like to tell you about why I am interested in incompetence in the workplace. Then, I'll be showing you how we managed to investigate this potentially embarrassing area in 10 different multinational companies. And finally, I'll show you our results that indicate that around 80% of middle managers have been promoted into a position for which they simply don't have the skills.

12.2 Use an "Outline" slide for longer presentations and for arts, humanities, and social sciences

An outline may be more useful when you are giving a longer presentation (20 minutes, 45 minutes) or for topics outside physical and life sciences. In this case the audience may need a slide showing the conceptual framework to help them understand the rest of your presentation. Keep it down to a maximum of four points, otherwise the audience may think that the presentation will be covering too much for them to readily assimilate. As always, you should focus on your main messages.

An outline is also useful when you are not describing some research project, but are talking more generally about a certain issue. In this case, the sequence of your presentation may not be immediately obvious and an outline might help to orient the audience.

In some disciplines, presenters begin with a slide containing a question. This question encapsulates the reason for their research, it is the question that they hope their research will answer. For example,

To what extent does Iran's foreign policy include realism?
Would online voting solve election fixing?
How has the Internet affected parent/child relationships?

The presenter then needs to have another slide in which he/she indicates the approach or context used to answer this question. This helps to give a structure to the presentation and to alert the audience to what they can expect to hear.

The outline slide for the last question could thus be

The Internet has

- ➢ replaced time previously dedicated to family interactions
- ➢ replaced educational role of parents
- ➢ given parents a mass of info on good parenting
- ➢ provided opportunities for shared entertainment

The presenter's commentary on the above slide could be

When I posed the question "How has the Internet affected parent/child relationships?" I began by focusing on the negative factors, such as how families spend less time together given that most kids today have their PC in their bedroom. And, as a mother myself, I also thought about how parents are being used less and less as a source of information to help kids with school work. But then I realised that parents today can use the Internet to learn about the behaviour of their children and how they can improve their relationships with them—there is so much useful information out there. So that was one positive factor. Another positive factor is that there is a lot of fun stuff on the Internet, particularly videos on YouTube that families can actually share together, in the same way as they might watch a TV show together. So these are the four factors that I have been studying, and today I would like to focus on the first and fourth points.

Note how the presenter

- does not read the four bullets but comments on them using different words
- involves the audience in the story of her decision-making process
- uses an informal but nevertheless professional style
- tells the audience that she is only going to talk about two of the points—she wouldn't have time to talk about all four, and this enables her to talk about two in more detail

12.3 Use transitions to guide your audience

You know two very important things that the audience does not know:

- what you did and found in your research
- the sequence of your slides and why they follow a particular structure

You need to help the audience follow your presentation. You cannot jump from one slide to the next at great speed. If the audience misses one particular point, they may lose the thread (i.e., the links, logical flow) of the rest of the presentation.

The way of moving from one slide to another, and from topic to topic, is crucial. For the audience it should be like following a map, and you need to make it very clear to them whenever you make a turn. Also, at each turn it is helpful if you summarize for them what you have told them so far. Those in the audience who missed a previous turn now have an opportunity to get back on the right road. This is a different from a paper, where readers can, if necessary, just retrace their steps.

In a presentation, these moves or turns are called transitions.

Before you move to the next section or group of slides

1. pause for two seconds. This signals to the audience that you are going to say something important
2. look at the audience and give a quick summary of the most important things you have said so far. Repetition may seem boring to you because you know the subject so well, but it gives the audience a chance to check their understanding
3. move on to the next section explaining how it relates to the previous one

This whole process should take about 20 seconds, so don't think it is unnecessarily increasing the length of your presentation.

12.4 Exploit your transitions

A transition is a good opportunity for

- you to slow down or change the pace of the presentation
- the audience (and you) to relax a little—remember that the audience cannot assimilate vast quantities of information in quick succession
- you to regain the audience's attention by making them curious about what is coming next.

12.5 Signal a move from one section to the next

Imagine at the beginning of your presentation you say something like, "*I am going to give you the three most important findings of our research*." Then the most obvious transition from the introduction to the main part of your presentation would be to say "*Okay, let's look at the first result.*" Then later when you introduce the other two results you can introduce them numerically, *the second, the third.*

If your structure is methodology, results, and discussion, then between the methodology and results you could say, "*Okay, so that covers the methodology, now I am going to outline our results, one of which was really quite unexpected.*" This reassures the audience that there is a plan to your presentation, and that they are being guided from step to step.

The second part of the above transition—*One of which was really quite unexpected*—highlights another benefit of transitions. You can use transitions to regain audience attention by getting them interested in hearing what you are going to say next.

12.6 Only move to the next slide when you've finished talking about the current slide

It is a good idea not to spend more than two minutes on one slide. The audience will soon get bored looking at the same slide and start thinking about something else. Don't move on to the next slide before you have finished talking about the current one. Otherwise the audience will stop listening to you and start absorbing the information on the next slide.

12.7 Only use an introductory phrase to a slide when strictly necessary

When the sequence of slides within a section is logical, you often don't need any expression to introduce the next slide. The transition shouldn't need any introductory explanation.

Instead of saying "*In this next slide we have a diagram of X which shows how to do Y*" you can simply say "*Here is a diagram of X which shows how to do Y,*" or even more succinct "*Here is how to do Y.*" By avoiding unnecessarily long introductory phrases the impact of your slides will be more dramatic.

12.8 Be concise

If you don't practice what to say when making transitions, you will probably improvise and say something like

> OK, that's all I wanted to say at this particular point about the infrastructure. What I would like to do next in this presentation is to take a brief look at the gizmo. This picture in this slide shows a gizmo. As you can see a gizmo is a . . .

Instead of attracting the audience's attention, the above phrases are full of redundancy, add no information, and are likely to send the audience back to sleep.

Try to make your transitions memorable.

> OK, here's something that you may not know about a gizmo: blah blah blah. In fact you can see here that a gizmo is . . .

12.9 Add variety to your transitions

Try to vary your technique for making transitions, so do not always use the same phrase. Here are some alternatives:

Turn the screen off : This immediately regains the audience's attention. You can then write something on the whiteboard or say something orally.

Ask a rhetorical question: For example, you can say, "*Have you ever wondered why it is impossible to predict when your PC is going to crash? Well, after I have summarized what we have just looked at, I am going to tell why experts think it is impossible but how we think we have actually managed to solve the problem.*"

Give the audience something to look forward to: The example above shows how you get the audience to concentrate now by telling them you will be giving them interesting information later. Another example: *In the next slide I will be showing you some fascinating data on xxx, but first . . .* or *Later on, we'll see how this works in practice . . .*

Signpost: Tell the audience where you are in the structure of your presentation. For example if you say "*And now to sum up briefly before the Q&A session*" you are alerting the audience that you presentation is nearly over.

Chapter 13
Methodology

You will learn how to

- explain a process/methodology
- talk about diagrams

Why is this important?

This part of the presentation is where the audience is most likely to get lost, so clear explanations are fundamental. Bear in mind that your audience will only absorb about 20% of the information you give them.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
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In this section there are many examples from presentations. As in the rest of this book, you will see the original version and the revised version. The original versions are all perfectly acceptable and if you are an inexperienced presenter you may find them more suitable than the revised versions. The revised versions should enable more experienced presenters to connect with the audience more effectively.

13.1 Regain the audience's attention

Most modern movies switch from scene to scene far more frequently than in movies made 20 to 30 years ago (and further back in the past). On the web, videos of three minutes or less tend to be watched far more frequently than those of ten minutes.

This means that our concentration span is getting shorter and shorter, so your audience need to be constantly stimulated if their attention is to be held.

When you describe your methodology, you are probably already three minutes into your presentation and thus your audience's attention will be decreasing.

You have to find ways of regaining it.

See Chapter 10 Getting and keeping the audience's attention

13.2 Give simple explanations and be careful when giving numbers

Explain things in a way that the audience does not have to make a big mental effort. Your audience will probably only be able to absorb about 40% of what you are saying. So it helps if you repeat anything complex for them—do not expect them to understand everything the first time.

If you use numerical examples, make sure the numbers appear on the slide as it is very difficult for audiences to mentally translate numbers at great speed into their own languages and then be able to follow the example.

13.3 Give examples first, technical explanations second

The methodology part should be one of the highlights of your presentation and you should have fun explaining it. It helps the audience to follow a technical explanation if you give examples and intuitions first and then explain the process. If you begin with theoretical aspects you will probably lose the audience and maybe get lost yourself. If you begin with a simple example you gain the attention of the audience and gain confidence yourself.

13.4 Reduce redundancy

Be brief and only talk about what is strictly necessary. Only spend more time if *how* you did something is more important than *what* you achieved, i.e., if your methodology is more important than your results or if at this stage in your research you have no results. In this case, explain the steps clearly and why your chosen methodology was suitable (or not) for what you wanted to do. But again only mention what the audience really needs to know in order to make sense of what you did.

Reduce any introductory phrases when describing diagrams and examples:

Here I present a panoramic view of the architecture. = This is the architecture.
Now you can see here an example of an interface. = Here is an interface.
We shall see two examples in the following slide. = So here are two examples
In conclusion we can say . . . = Basically, . . .

13.5 Just show the key steps in a process or procedure

If you are showing your audience a process, it is tempting to show them all the steps of the process. The typical way to do this is to cut and paste a complex diagram from a book or paper, or to begin with a skeleton diagram and then gradually add new parts to it either via animation or a series of overlapping slides. This has three major problems:

- audiences can recognize a cut and paste—it gives the idea that you couldn't find the time to create something specifically for them
- the animation may not work (due to the transfer from your PC to the conference PC)
- gradually building up a diagram may take too long and can be very tedious for the audience. Also, if you realize that it is taking too long, you will probably speed up your explanation and your audience may not grasp what you are saying.

The solution is to ignore any pre-existing graphics and start from scratch. This does not have to be a laborious process, because you only need to highlight the essential. Your aim is to guide the reader through the highlights of the process. If something is quite complex, then break it up into manageable steps over two or three slides—but occasionally go back one slide or two, to highlight to the audience the various connections. If it takes more than three slides, then consider that you are probably entering into too much detail.

13.6 Explain why you are not describing the whole process

If you think people will criticize you for not explaining the whole process, you can say,

> We don't have time to look at the complete process, so I just wanted to show you this part. If you are interested in the whole process then I can explain it at the bar or you can look it up on my web page.

If you are worried that someone in your audience will want to see absolutely every detail in your diagram, chart, table, or graph, then as you show your slide say,

> This is a very simplified version of . . . This is what the prototype looks like in very general terms . . . The full diagram is on my web page. I will give you the address at the end of the presentation.

You can also use phrases that indicate that you are only talking in general terms, such as

> For the most part . . . Broadly/Generally speaking . . . With one or two exceptions . . . As a general rule . . .

Then you can

- show a diagram of the complete process but magnify one or two parts of the process that you would like to focus on. Magnify means making those particular parts bigger so that the audience's attention is only drawn to those points. The other parts will in any case be deliberately too small for the audience to see
- just show three consecutive parts of the process and focus on the one in the middle, showing how it connects to the previous part and the next part
- highlight using a circle or a particular color the aspect (e.g., a row or column of a detailed table) that you want the audience to focus on so that they will ignore the other information
- use a different font and a bigger font size

13.7 Use active and passive forms effectively

You can use active and passive verbs even when describing a process in which you were/are not directly involved. Look at this extract explaining how ink is removed from magazines so that they can be recycled.

> When the magazines first arrive at the de-inking plant, they go through the wire cutter, which is this thing here *[indicates the wire cutter on the diagram in the slide].* The blade of the wire cutter slips under the baling wire, cuts it and releases loose magazines onto the conveyor. Now here you can see how the magazines then move up the conveyor to a pulping machine, which stirs the paper until a thin pulp is formed. After the magazine pulp has been thoroughly cleaned, it is piped to the final step—the paper machine, which you can see here.

Where she can, the presenter has used the active form (in the first part of the description: *arrive, move, cuts, releases*, etc.). In the last sentence she decides to use the passive (*is formed, has been cleaned, is piped*, etc.). This is because the recipient of the action, i.e., the pulp derived from the magazines, is a more relevant subject than the machinery used to move it around, since it is this pulp that is the subject of the whole process and also the subject of this part of the presentation. Moving from active to passive also creates variety in the description, and not using the passive all the time gives energy and dynamism to the description.

Note also how the presenter guides the audience by indicating on the diagram where they are in the process and by explaining technical vocabulary by pointing at the relevant item (*the wire cutter, which is this thing here*).

13.8 Indicate where you are in a process

Clearly when you are describing a process, such as recycling paper (see example above), you cannot always maintain full eye contact with the audience. You may occasionally need to point at the diagram. You can do this in various ways:

- use a telescopic pointer pen—they range in length from about 500–1000 mm and are relatively inexpensive. You can then stand to the left or right of the screen and use the pointer to indicate the item you are talking about
- use the pointer on PowerPoint (to turn it off, press the A key)
- draw on the screen. To show the pen, press *ctrl* or *cmd* + P (to turn it off, press the A key)

It is best to avoid using the laser pointer on the remote as it can be difficult to manipulate.

13.9 Tell a story rather than sounding like a technical manual

You can make a very technical explanation more interesting if you tell it like a story.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The method was carried out as follows. Initially, X was done which led to a failure as a consequence of … The next attempt involved …	First I tried this, but it didn't work because … so I tried that … unfortunately that failed too probably because … finally, one of the members of research group had a brainwave and …

If you insist on giving a very technical explanation, keep it as short as possible. Also, give frequent summaries so that the audience can understand how each step is related. You can then say "*In other words* …" and give a simpler summary.

In other types of presentations you may need to explain for example how you chose patients for a clinical trial, how you chose people for a survey, or how you selected specific data from a databank. You can involve your audience much more if you

- talk about the selection process like a story
- use active verbs rather than passive verbs
- exclude nonessential details

Below are two examples. The first example is a medical study involving laser vision correction:

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The protocol, approved by the University Internal Ethics Committee, was carried out in accordance with what was outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, and eligible patients were enrolled in the study during a screening visit after providing informed consent. The study comprised 100 patients that is to say 200 eyes, with various levels of impaired vision who had been referred to the Department of Ophthalmology and Neurosurgery. The inclusion criteria covered ages between 20 and 50 years, ... Patients were not included if any of the following conditions were found to be present: corneal astigmatism =1D, surgical complications ...	Basically, we selected 100 patients that members of our department had seen over the last year. We decided to study patients with an age range between 20 and 50, as those are the types of people who tend to opt for laser treatment. They had various levels of impaired vision. For obvious reasons we excluded any patients who had had any of these conditions *[shows list on slide].*

Note how the revised version leaves out some of the details of the original (Declaration of Helsinki, ethics committee, informed consent, university department name). Although getting the approval of an ethics review committee (ERC) and informed consent from patients are cornerstones in medical research, the audience knows this already and does not need to hear it. It would only be interesting if an ERC had not given approval or if the patients had no idea what the research was about. The name of the university department was probably on the title slide and/or in the conference proceedings and is not relevant here.

This second example is from a survey on Vietnamese students' ability to write scientific English:

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The research was conducted at two departments at Hanoi University of Technology, hereafter referred to as departments A and B. Ninety-four postgraduate male and female students took part in the experiment and survey. All had studied English for at least 7 years ...	For my survey I needed Vietnamese students with a sufficient knowledge of English to be able to write technical English. Initially I started with some undergraduate students, as they were the easiest to find and had the most time available. But it soon became clear that postgraduates would be a better option, as the undergraduates did not have many assignments in English. Then another problem was that many Vietnamese PhD students actually study abroad, so it was quite difficult to find a sufficient number all studying in the same place, and all with a good knowledge of English. In the end, I discovered two departments at the Hanoi University of Technology ...

Both of the original versions would be possible in a presentation, but audiences might find the revised versions more interesting because

- the original versions sound like they were lifted directly from a paper. People do not usually talk in such a way. The use of the passive form (except when describing a process, see Section 13.7) is generally a sign of formality and is more often found in writing
- the revised versions make the presenter the protagonist (the main actor), the presenter talks the audience through the decision-making process in a way that makes the presenter seem like a real human being rather than an anonymous provider of information

13.10 Bring your figures, graphs, etc., alive

Constantly think to yourself "Why should the audience be interested in what I am saying?" If you show a figure, bring it alive to the audience. Try and transmit some of that energy you had when you were doing your research and you got your great/unexpected results.

Compare these two versions of a presenter's commentary of a slide showing a diagram of how a software application (jscope) works.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
As you can see, this picture shows the framework of our software and illustrates that the storage of the information can be arbitrarily distributed, that the registration of the resources is guaranteed by a library, and that the discovery of the information is simplified by another library.	So here's the framework. jscope has loads of features. *[pause for two seconds while audience looks at the diagram]* I particularly like three things about it. First, you can get anyone to store the info, completely randomly. Second, this library here took us months to compile. But what it does is to guarantee that resources are registered. Third, this other library helps you to find the info you want.

Note how the revised version

- numbers the three features, thus making it easier for the presenter to list them and easier for the audience to assimilate them
- avoids excessive use of nouns (*storage, registration, discovery*)
- uses the active rather than the passive
- uses personal pronouns (*I, us, we, you*)
- cuts words that may be difficult to pronounce (e.g., *arbitrarily*)
- uses more words than the original, but this is compensated for by its high digestibility factor (seven short sentences versus one long sentence)

For more on describing figures, graphs etc see Sections 9.11, 9.12, 9.13, and 9.14

13.11 Minimize or cut the use of equations, formulas, and calculations

Equations, formulas, and calculations are difficult and time consuming to explain. They

- rarely interest the audience and often confuse them
- may distract the audience—they start deciphering the equation and stop listening to you

If you show the formula below on a slide, the temptation for you is to explain each of the symbols. This would take several minutes and by the time you have finished the audience will probably have forgotten what you said at the beginning.

$$kV(s) = \frac{q_1 S(s) + \sigma_2 T(s)}{\beta_3 U(s)}$$

Instead of explaining the math in detail, just talk about its importance and how it relates to your study. You can then give details in a handout. For example you could say,

> I am not going to explain the details of this formula—you can find them on my website, which I will give to you at the end of the presentation. Basically the formula says that if you want to analyze how easy it is to understand a written sentence, then you shouldn't just concentrate on how many words are used, but also the stress (S) and the time (T) involved in trying to understand it. So U stands for level of understanding. Using this verbosity index we found that scientific papers are 37 times more difficult to read than advertisements for products.

If you must use math, talk slowly, and go through everything step by step. Remember that people normally study equations on paper; it is not easy for an audience to absorb a formula in a very short space of time.

Chapter 14
Results and Discussion

You will learn how to

- communicate the value of your research
- explain statistics
- not overload on details
- talk about negative results

Why is this important?

This is the part of the presentation that may be of most interest to the audience but it comes at a point when audience concentration is likely to be at its lowest. An audience will forget more than 75% of what they hear within 24 hours, so informing them of all the details of your results is a waste of time.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_14, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

14.1 Tell the audience what they need to know—not everything that you know

Unless describing the methodology is the main purpose of the presentation, the results are usually given in the middle of the presentation. In the middle means in terms of time, not the number of slides. You may in fact be towards the end of your slides, as you will go through the first slides more quickly.

Your findings and results should generally be the highlight of your presentation. The audience just need brief answers to the following questions:

- what did you find?
- was it what you expected?
- what does it mean?
- why should we be interested?

In a 10-minute presentation, this part should be just a couple of slides. It is not advisable to introduce interesting side issues, as they might confuse the audience.

Try to avoid the temptation to give the audience the full Wikipedia explanation. If you present a slide full of information, you yourself know what is important and where to focus your eyes, but the audience doesn't.

To make it clear that you are generalizing about your results, see Section 13.6.

14.2 Explain statistics, graphs, and charts in a meaningful way

The statistics that you give the audience (whether your own statistics or those of others) will be very familiar to you, so there is a natural tendency to explain them too quickly and in too much detail. The secret is just to select a few and explain them in a way that the audience can understand.

For more on describing figures, graphs etc see Sections 9.11, 9.12, 9.13, and 9.14

14.3 Communicate the value of what you have done—put your results in the big picture

For you it may be clear how your results fit in within the current state of the art, but for your audience it may not. Tell the audience how your findings contribute to knowledge in your specific field. Show and tell them the benefits. Use expressions such as

What this means is that . . . The key benefit of this is . . . What I would like you to notice here is . . . What I like about this is . . . Possible applications of this are . . . I would imagine that these results would also be useful for . . .

ADVANCED TIPS

14.4 Avoid phrases that might make you sound overconfident or arrogant

When you talk about your results, it is generally a good idea to leave your discussion open to other interpretations. Compare the two versions below:

ORIGINAL	REVISED
These results *definitely prove* that plain ethylene-vinyl acetate and cellulose are incompatible. *Our results also demonstrate* that cellulose fibers *are* more effective fillers for . . . *No other researchers* have previously managed to find evidence of this effectiveness. *Cellulose should therefore be used* in preference to . . .	These results *would seem to indicate* that plain ethylene-vinyl acetate and cellulose are incompatible. *We believe that our results also highlight* that cellulose fibers *may* be more effective fillers for . . . *To the best of my knowledge,* no other researchers have previously managed to find evidence of this effectiveness. *I would thus recommend using* cellulose in preference to . . .

Note how in the revised version you are not removing the strength of what you are saying. In fact, you gain more credibility if you stress that you are open minded. You show the audience that you are aware that new discoveries are being made all the time and that there may be different ways to achieve the same result.

This means of communication is called "hedging," and in presentations it should prevent the audience from seeing you as too arrogant or presumptuous.

You can protect yourself from such criticism by not stating things too categorically:

- put *would seem to/would appear to* before verbs such as *prove, demonstrate, give concrete evidence, support* (as in the revised example above)
- consider replacing verbs such as *prove* and *demonstrate* with less strong verbs such as *suggest*, *imply,* and *indicate*
- hedge strong affirmations using modal verbs (*would, might, may, could*) for example *this could possibly be the reason for . . . this may mean that . . .*
- replace adverbs that appear to leave no room for doubt, such as *definitely, certainly, surely, undoubtedly, indisputably,* with more tentative forms such as *probably, possibly, likely* or *it is probable/possible/likely that . . .*
- avoid preceding categorical statements such as "*No data exist in the literature on this topic*" or "*This is the first time that such a result has been achieved*." You can replace such expressions with *to the best of our knowledge, as far as I know, I believe, I think.*

- be careful not to sound like you want to impose your ideas—the phrase *Cellulose should therefore be used* is very strong, as in this case there is little difference between *should* and *must* (they are both often found in sentences describing obligations)

For more on hedging see companion volume English for Writing Research Papers.

14.5 Tell the audience about any problems in interpreting your results

Don't worry if there is not necessarily one unique or clear way to interpret your results. Again you can use a "hedging" technique, and admit such difficulties:

Interpreting these results is not straightforward primarily because the precise function of XYZ has not yet been clarified.
Although the physiological meaning *cannot be confirmed* by any direct observation, I believe that . . .
Despite the fact that *there appears to be* no clear correlation, I think/imagine that . . .
One way of explaining these contrasting results could be . . .
One of the possible interpretations for such discrepancies might be . . . but our future work should be able to clarify this aspect
The results did not confirm our hypothesis, nevertheless I think that . . .

Note how many of the phrases above include modal verbs (*might, could, should*), adverbs of concession (*although, even though, despite the fact, nonetheless, nevertheless*), and verbs that express a hypothesis rather than 100% certainty (*think, believe, imagine*). Such phrases are all useful for making what you are saying sound more tentative.

Also, look at the words in italics in the first three sentences: the subject of the verbs (*interpret, confirm, appear*) is impersonal, the speaker does not say, for instance, "*when I tried to interpret these results*." This allows speakers to distance themselves from their results, to give the impression that the results do not depend strictly on them personally.

14.6 Be positive about others in your field

If you were Jim Smith and heard the original version below, imagine how you would feel.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
I completely disagree with Jim Smith's interpretation of his own findings. He clearly misunderstood the significance of the outliers and failed to take into account the results of the third study.	I found Smith's interpretation of his findings very interesting, though I do think there could be another reason for the outliers. Also, it might be worth analyzing the results of the third study in a different light.

Even if what the presenter said was true, you wouldn't be very happy to hear it expressed in such a negative way. As highlighted in the revised version, the secret is again to "hedge" what you are saying using the same techniques as suggested in 14.4 and 14.5, and to always be polite and constructive.

14.7 Explain whether your results were expected or not

If your results were not what you were expecting the audience will be curious to know why. Try to present the reasons in an interesting way, rather than as cold facts:

ORIGINAL	REVISED
The research failed to find agreement with our initial hypotheses. The results indicated X and not Y. Further analysis of the data revealed the necessity to effect a modification of a fundamental nature in our perspective.	I was surprised at the results, to say the least. It was actually the middle of the night, and I remember phoning the others in the team to tell them the news ... The results were not what we were expecting at all. In fact they indicated X rather than Y. And now that we have examined the data in more detail, what we found is now beginning to cause a fundamental change of view.

When, as in the revised version, you comment on your feelings and you use a narrative style, you inevitably use more words. This is not a problem, as in this case if you were concise (like I have suggested you should always try to be) you would lose the drama and thus the interest of the audience.

14.8 Be upfront about your poor/uninteresting/negative results

A problem for researchers in some fields is that they agree to give a presentation at a conference that is scheduled 6–9 months later, hoping they will be able to present the results of some ongoing research. But they end up with unexpected, uninteresting, or seemingly inexplicable results.

But as stated in the popular journal New Scientist, *Science rarely delivers what scientists set out to find*.

Scientists who have been in research for many years will tell you that over the course of their careers, quite a large percentage of their results were not what they were predicting. But if you ask them what they do with these "negative" results, the good scientists will tell you that they learn from them. And, they tell their colleagues about their failures so that these colleagues can learn from them too. To do this they use papers in journals, but also presentations where they know there are often people in the audience who will see these unexpected results as a challenge and may help find a solution.

Dr Ben Goldacre is a British medical doctor who has spent much of his career trying to get medical scientists, the pharmaceutical industry, and the mass media

to be more transparent in publishing negative results. He talks about the dangers (including the death of innocent patients) of suppressing negative data. This is what he says in his fascinating and very readable book "Bad Science":

> 'Publication bias' is a very interesting and very human phenomenon. For a number of reasons, positive trials are more likely to get published than negative ones. It's easy enough to understand, if you put yourself in the shoes of the researcher. Firstly, when you get a negative result, it feels as if it's all been a bit of a waste of time. It's easy to convince yourself that you found nothing, when in fact you discovered a very useful piece of information: the thing that you were testing *doesn't work*. . . . Publication bias is common, and in some fields it is more rife [widespread] than in others. In 1995, only 1 per cent of all articles published in alternative medicine journals gave a negative result. The most recent figure is 5 per cent negative.

The aim of a congress is to share experiences—both good and bad. If you have, or appear to have, negative results the audience will certainly be sympathetic, and probably relieved, because most of them will have been in the same situation. So

- admit to the audience that the results were not what you were hoping for
- never hide the poor results or invent anything to make them more interesting
- say what you plan to do next to resolve these problems
- ask the audience for help—have they experienced this, what did they do? Encourage them to come and talk to you later.

If you don't do the above, you risk giving a bad presentation because you won't be motivated to prepare well, thinking that your results are not interesting, and thus your presentation is unlikely to be inspiring.

In any case, consider asking your professors and colleagues about how they resolve the problems of presenting negative or unexpected data.

14.9 Encourage discussion and debate

Conferences tend to me much more interesting when the presenters speak convincingly about their topic, but they leave the door open to other possible approaches and interpretations. Also, they are willing to discuss any limitations in their research. If you follow this practice you will

- sound more credible. You will seem confident enough to give the audience space to suggest alternative interpretations
- sound less arrogant. Your aim is not to lecture to the audience like a university professor, but rather to discuss your ideas with them. It is important that your tone of voice is friendly and not hard. You do not want the audience to be passive listeners but to be active in asking questions, both in the Q&A session and after the presentation at the bar or social dinner

A series of presentations where ideas and results are presented in a way that there is no room for debate does not make for a stimulating conference.

Chapter 15
Conclusions

You will learn how to

- state your conclusions clearly and succinctly
- talk about your future work
- elicit feedback from the audience

Why is this important?

The conclusions are an essential part of a presentation—you want to remind the audience of your most important points/messages and leave them with a positive final impression, which will then encourage them to read your paper and contact you in the future.

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15.1 Be brief and don't deviate from your planned speech

In a ten-minute presentation, your conclusions should probably last around one minute—in fact, you should only need three or four sentences. If you are not brief you will lose the audience's interest and they won't be able to remember what you have said.

It is vital to prepare your closing and know exactly what you are going to say (every word) and do. Ending suddenly by saying "*that's it*" or "*thank you*" does not create a good impression.

First, stand confidently and look directly at your audience. Signal that you are coming to an end. This is important as it will wake them up and get them to concentrate on the final points that you want them to remember.

Like the beginning, it is worth trying to memorize your last 60 seconds so that you do not have to look at your slides, laptop, or notes—but just at the audience. This will give the audience the sensation that you are confident and professional.

State your conclusions clearly and a little bit more slowly than in the previous part of the presentation—try not to be in a rush to finish!

15.2 Make sure your final slides give useful information

Look at the slide below. If the presenter deleted it, would the audience still be able to follow what he/she says? Very probably, yes.

> FUTURE WORK
>
> ➢ We want to perform experiments using the prototype gizmo
> ➢ We will enhance the prototype so that we can produce an industrial version
> ➢ We will trial the industrial version in hospitals

When you use a slide to summarize your main points, you really want the attention of the audience, so don't write full sentences. By using short phrases you force the audience to think about what they might mean, and this should lead the audience to being more attentive. So the above slide could be rewritten as

> FUTURE WORK
>
> ➢ Experiment using gizmo
> ➢ Enhance prototype to industry
> ➢ Trial in hospitals

Such a slide should help you to remember the three points and make the audience more alert to hear the full meaning behind the three words.

However, as mentioned in Section 7.7, using full sentences may be appropriate if you have an audience with poor English listening skills.

Alternatively, you could avoid having a conclusions slide. Instead, you move to the whiteboard and write your three key words—*experiment, enhance, trial*. Simply by getting the audience to move the focus of their eyes will catch their attention and then they are more likely to listen to what you say.

15.3 Show your enthusiasm

As I hope I have highlighted throughout this book, presentations are most effective when the speaker uses simple language, talks to the audience as if they were a group of friends, and sounds convinced (and if possible enthusiastic). Compare these two versions of conclusions to a presentation on the conversion of organic waste into energy.

ORIGINAL	REVISED
Well, we have arrived at the end of this presentation now. In conclusion, from these results the following considerations can be drawn. Using the methodology outlined in this presentation, the production of a certain quantity of energy can be derived from the utilization of organic waste. The consequence is that small farms have the potential for the generation of sufficient quantities of fuel and heat to satisfy their needs, thus leading to the reduction of the current reliance on oil and nuclear power. Thank you for your attention.	So, just a quick summary. Using our process, we can produce energy. Energy from organic waste: THE MOST DISGUSTING sludge in the world. This virtuous circle means that small farms could generate all the fuel and the heat that they need just by using waste! So we all become less dependent on oil and nuclear power. And the added benefit is that this helps factories and cities to resolve the problem of waste disposal, which is particularly complex for organic waste. Two problems resolved at the same time!

Note how the original version

- takes 30 words before reaching the phrase *the production* .., which is the first time that the audience hear key information. The revised version only takes eight words to reach this point
- repeats words unnecessarily (e.g., *presentation*). The revised version repeats words (e.g., *energy* in the second line) for dramatic effect
- uses a preponderance of nouns (*production, utilization, generation*). The revised version uses more verbs (*produce, using, generate*)
- uses no emotive adjectives (e.g., in the revised version the presenter uses *disgusting*)
- doesn't allow the presenter to sound enthusiastic

15.4 Five ways to end a presentation

Below are some ways to end your presentation, which are similar to the ways suggested to begin your presentation (see Chapter 11):

1. use a picture
2. directly relate your findings to the audience
3. give a statistic
4. ask for feedback
5. talk about your future work

As you read them, note how they try to do some or all of the following:

- announce to the audience that the speaker is about to give his/her conclusions and do this using just two or three words (e.g., *in conclusion, to sum up*). Audiences tend to have a higher attention if they know something is about to finish
- repeat the key points of the presentation in order to give the audience a clear message to take home and remember
- try to address/involve the audience directly—again this helps to capture audience attention

15.4.1 Use a picture

This is probably the easiest way to end your presentation. There are many ways to use pictures in your final slide:

- if you had a key picture that you used earlier in the presentation, you can re-exploit by superimposing your conclusions on it. This picture should be chosen so that it reminds the audience of an important point that you mentioned earlier
- if you focused on your country when you were introducing yourself at the beginning of the presentation, you could use another photo or a collage of photos depicting scenes from your country and suggest that the audience travel there some time
- if the basis of your conclusions is your future work, you could create a picture that illustrates your concepts or simply gives the idea of future work or work in progress. A typical picture people use is a "men at work" road sign—if possible customize it in some way to differentiate yourself from the thousands of other researchers who use such a slide
- if you are feeling creative you can design an amusing slide (e.g., a cartoon or photo) that sums up your message. You can get ideas for this by looking at the endings of presentations on ted.com

It is worth investing some time in creating a good final slide which the audience will find memorable. And you will be able to exploit or adapt this slide in

many future presentations too. For example, I live and work in Pisa, Italy. I had an artist draw a funny cartoon of me holding up the Leaning Tower. I have been using this cartoon for many years during my presentations and it always gets a smile from the audience thus helping to end the presentation on a warm and positive note.

15.4.2 Directly relate your findings to the audience

You can relate the implications of your research directly to the audience—tell them what impact it might have on them personally if your findings were, or were not, put into action. For example

> In conclusion, our comparison of inner city schools in poor areas and private schools in richer areas highlighted that kids from private schools achieve about 20% better results. What we found to be critical was what children do during their summer holidays. The parents of the children from richer families tended to give their kids access to more books and to encourage them to visit museums and so on. Kids from the inner schools simply didn't have this extra boost from their parents. And just to remind you what I said during my discussion of the results, this means that having access to more computers or to better teachers does not seem to make much difference. So if any of you have kids, I think there are four lessons to be learned. First encourage them to be as proactive as possible, second tell them not be afraid of authority, third get them to engage in critical thinking, and finally don't let them spend the whole of the summer holiday lying on the beach or surfing YouTube and Facebook.

15.4.3 Give a statistic

I watched a researcher give a presentation on an alternator for an automobile engine. An alternator converts power from the gasoline engine that drives the car along. In his conclusions he told us that using his alternator would reduce our consumption of gasoline by 2–3% a year, thus saving us 90 euros.

The problem is that 90 euros doesn't sound like a big saving. A more effective way of communicating this information might have been to say

> So, to sum up, I think there are three advantages of my design for an alternator. The first two advantages, as I showed you when I was explaining the design and development, are that it costs less to produce than traditional alternators, and a massive 80% of its parts can be recycled. But I think the third benefit is the one that will interest you the most. My alternator will reduce gasoline consumption by about 2–3%. That may not sound very much. But if everyone in this room used it—I have counted about 50 people here—then we would save nearly 5000 euros a year. If every car driver in this country used it, we would save about 1.8 billion euros a year. That's a lot of money saved on importing gasoline from abroad. And that's without even thinking about the reduced environmental impact.

Using interesting statistics is a great way to end a presentation. But

- relate them to the audience in some way
- if necessary, multiply them to get a number that is powerful and evocative

15.4.4 Ask for feedback

You can use your conclusions to get help from your audience. In the following example, the presenter uses the three points in his conclusions to stimulate interest in the audience:

> What would be great for us is to have your feedback on these three points *[points to his slide which contains three key conclusions]*. First, it seems to us that our Gizmo has solved the problem of overheating—what do you think? Second, our results would appear to show both P and Q—so what is the reason for this apparent contradiction? It would be really useful if any of you could give me some ideas on this. Third, we are pretty sure that our Gizmo could be used in hospitals—but maybe you know of other possible applications.

15.4.5 Talk about your future work

Your plans for the future are actually one of the main reasons you are at the congress. This is a fantastic opportunity to do some self-promotion. You may have up to 100 people listening to you. One of them might be interested in helping you or collaborating with you. Tell the audience that you would welcome speaking to anyone who could suggest ways of continuing your line of research. If you have done a convincing presentation and have showed that you are the kind of person other people might like working with—not just because of your scientific knowledge but equally importantly how you seem as a person—then you might find that you get an invitation to work in another laboratory that might have more equipment or funds than your current one.

Talking about future work is particularly appropriate when you have presented negative findings, when you have told the audience that your research did not go as you expected. You can also use your conclusions to talk about the limitations of your work. In both cases, your future work will probably thus involve rectifying the problems you encountered and telling the audience how you plan to do this.

> A possible limitation of our work is that we have used two rather simple datasets. Unfortunately, due to computational constraints we couldn't use larger networks. But as I hope I have highlighted, we are still only in the first phase. So we are more interested in the methodology. But in the next phase, we are planning to implement the code using other programming languages. In any case, I think that there are two main benefits of our methodology compared to previous ones. First, . . .

15.5 Write/Show something interesting on your final slide

About 95% of scientific presentations seem to end with a slide that says one of the following:

1. Acknowledgments
2. Thank you *or* Thank you for your attention

3. Questions? *or* Any Questions?
4. Contact details: adrian.wallwork@gmail.com

The first, *Acknowledgments*, is not a memorable way to end a presentation. The people you acknowledge are not likely to be of interest to the audience (see Section 6.1), and so their final impression will be of a very uninteresting slide containing no useful information.

The second, thanking the audience, is a standard way to signal that the presentation is over. One of my students said that she always uses it because "*It seems impolite not to do it because everybody else does it.*" This could in fact be a good reason not to use it as it is very much overexploited, and will probably not be appreciated by an audience who may have already seen 20 presentations in the last 24 hours that end in such a way.

The third one is an effective, though again overexploited, way to begin a question and answer session.

The last one (contact details) gives vital information. But it could be expressed in a way that will really encourage people to contact you, for example

Please get in touch! adrian.wallwork@gmail.com

If you use the second, third or fourth solutions, either individually or in combination, it's nice to superimpose the words on a photo in one of the ways suggested in Section 15.4.1.

I have seen many great 'thank you' slides in which the 'thank you' appears to be being said by the person or animal shown in the background photograph. For example, I watched a medical researcher from Kenya do a presentation on possible treatments for diseases that affect millions of African children. Her 'thank you' was a bubble coming out of the mouth of an African child. Another presentation was on planting wildflowers in the middle of roundabouts. In this case the 'thank you' was 'said' by some butterflies that were fluttering above the flowers!

15.6 Prepare a sequence of identical copies of your last slide

Typically if you hit the advance button while showing your last slide you drop out of the presentation program. This then means the audience will see the smaller window of the presentation and your desk top—this does not look very professional. Duplicate two or three copies of your last speaking slide so that if you accidentally advance one too many times at the end of your presentation, the slide looks like it has not changed.

After these slides, you should include some slides that answer questions that you expect to be asked. These slides will be useful during Q&A sessions after the presentation.

Chapter 16
Questions and Answers

You will learn how to

- anticipate questions from the audience
- deal with difficult questions
- react when you don't understand a question
- exploit "useful phrases" to extricate yourself from difficult situations

Why is this important?

If you know you have prepared well for this difficult part of the presentation, it will give you confidence. In addition, the questioners may be the same people that could help you clarify important points about your research or who may want to collaborate with you or invite you to their lab.

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16.1 Don't underestimate the importance of the Q&A session

Questions from the audience may inspire you to give interesting insights into your research that may not have come up during the main part of the presentation, and may stimulate ideas for future research.

You may feel that the worst is over and you can relax. But don't feel too relaxed because you need to be completely focused to answer questions, particularly difficult ones. If you are very hesitant or seem unsure about your answers in a Q&A session, then much of the positive impact of your presentation will be lost.

Be very careful of your body language. For example presenters who fold their arms may be perceived as being defensive.

16.2 Prepare in advance for all possible questions

The Q&A session may be the part that you are worried about the most, as it seems that you have no control over the questions the audience might ask you. In reality you do have some control, as long as you give yourself time to prepare before the presentation.

Practice your presentation in front of colleagues, friends, and relatives, and get them to write down three questions that they would like you to answer. Choose the ones that you think are the most relevant, then prepare answers to them.

If you have thought of all the questions your audience are likely to ask, it will enable you to

- seem professional in your immediate ability to answer a question
- stand a better chance of understanding (in terms of the words the questioner uses) such questions when they are asked
- prepare in advance extra slides to answer such questions
- prepare yourself mentally for difficult questions from difficult people, and during the session remain calm and polite

16.3 Learn what to say before you introduce the Q&A session

Some things you might want to say before the question and answer session are

- tell the audience where they can find the relevant documentation, handouts etc.,
- tell them whether they can/should contact you (give your details) or someone else
- thank the audience
- ask them if they have any questions. Note: if you are at a conference and the chairperson is present, then he or she will generally invite the audience to ask questions

16.4 Give the audience time to respond to your call for questions

It is normally the chairperson's job to ask if anyone has any questions. If he/she doesn't, then you can ask the audience yourself.

When you say, "*Does anyone have any questions?*" give the audience more than just a few seconds, even if you secretly hope that no one will ask you anything so that you can finish and return to your hotel room!

On the other hand, if you are worried that no one will ask you a question, you can

- arrange for one of your colleagues to ask a question that you have already prepared for him/her
- ask yourself a question, e.g., *One question I am often asked is . . .*

16.5 Get the questioner to stand up and reply to the whole audience

Sometimes the reason you or the audience can't understand the question, is because the questioner is sitting down and he/she cannot be seen or heard very easily. Simply say

> Do you think you could stand up and speak a bit louder? Thank you.

This has the added advantage that you have a second chance to hear the question yourself!

Answer not only the questioner but the whole audience. Good presenters tend to maintain eye contact with all the audience, but keep going back to the questioner to check from their body language (e.g., nodding, positive smiling) that he/she is satisfied with the answer.

16.6 Repeat the questions

If your audience is quite big, repeat any questions from the audience so that

- the rest of the audience can hear the question clearly—this is particularly true if the question comes from someone in the front row, as the back rows will not be able to hear it
- you can reformulate any contorted questions
- you have time to think about an answer
- the questioner can check that you have understood his/her question

In any case, give yourself two to three seconds to formulate your answer before responding.

16.7 Remember that it is not just your fault if you can't understand the question

Your ability to understand the questions depends not just on you. It is also the responsibility of the questioner to phrase and enunciate the question in a way that you will understand it.

So, if you don't understand a question, particularly from a native speaker of English, simply say

> I am sorry, but like many people in the audience, I am not a native English speaker. Could you speak a little more slowly please? Thank you.

Alternatively you could say,

> Would you mind emailing me that question, and then I will get back to you?
> Do you think you could ask me that question again during the coffee break?
> Sorry, I really need to check with a colleague before being able to answer that question.

16.8 Don't interrupt the questioner unless . . .

Most people don't appreciate being interrupted when they are asking a question. However, if they are clearly having difficulty in expressing themselves and you feel it would be right to help them, you could say, "*So you are asking me if . . .*" Basically you are anticipating what they want to say, and saying it in your own words for them.

If their question is taking a very long time to ask (particularly if it seems that they are just using the opportunity to talk themselves), you can say

> Sorry, I am not exactly sure what your question is. I think it might be best if you asked me at the bar.

If you realize that the question has limited interest for the rest of the audience, respectfully say to the questioner,

> For me this is a fascinating topic, but I think it might be best if we discuss this during the break. If that's okay with you. Now, does anyone else have any questions?

16.9 Be concise

When answering a question it helps to be concise, particularly as you might otherwise forget what the original question was.

If the question only requires the answer yes or no, you can be suitably brief and move on to the next question.

Sometimes you will get two-part questions. It's generally the best option to choose the part of the question that is simplest to answer first. If you forget the other part of the question, you can ask them again, or move on to another question, and then go up to the person after the presentation and talk to them directly.

There are some questions that you could discuss for hours, but the questioner is not asking you to tell them everything you know about the topic, but just what is relevant to now. If you are tempted to begin a long conversation with someone in the audience, offer to meet up later.

16.10 Always be polite

Very occasionally questioners in the audience seem to want to provoke us, and one natural tendency is to become defensive. However, if you watch professional presenters they never say anything negative about other researchers or their findings. Likewise, you don't need to take any criticisms or objections personally. Simply say

> I think you have raised an interesting point and it would be great if we could discuss it in the bar.
> I was not aware of those findings. Perhaps you could tell me about them at the social dinner.

Be aware that some people just ask questions to demonstrate their own knowledge. In this case, you can say,

> You are absolutely right. I didn't mention that point because it is quite technical/because there was no time. But it is covered in my paper.

For more on handling questions and understanding native English speakers, see the companion volume English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing.

Chapter 17
Useful Phrases

You will learn how to

- use the most appropriate phrase in different stages of your presentation
- recognize, and thus understand, the typical phrases used in other people's presentations

Why is this important?

Selecting some of the phrases below will give you confidence when you move from slide to slide and topic to topic. They will also enable you to deal with unexpected situations and with difficult questions that the audience may ask you.

Note: You don't need to learn all the phrases listed in this chapter, just choose the ones you find easiest to say and remember.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2_17, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

17.1 Introductions and outline

Introducing institute/department

Hi. Thanks for coming . . .
I am a PhD student/researcher/technician at . . .
I am doing a PhD/a Masters/some research at . . .
I am part of a team of 20 researchers and most of our funding comes from . . .
The work that I am going to present to you today was carried out with the collaboration of the University of . . .

Telling the audience what point your research has reached and in what context it is

What I am going to present is actually still only in its early stages, but I really think that our findings so far are worth telling you.
We are already at a quite advanced stage of the research, but I was hoping to get some feedback from you on certain aspects relating to . . .
Our research, which we have just finished, is actually part of a wider project involving . . .

Giving a general outline (formal)

In this presentation I am going to/I would like to/I will
discuss some findings of an international project
examine/analyze/bring to your attention
introduce the notion of/a new model of
review/discuss/describe/argue that
address a particular issue, which in my opinion, ..
give an analysis of/explore the meaning of
cite research by Wallwork and Southern

Giving your agenda (traditional)

I will begin with an introduction to . . .
I will begin by giving you an overview of . . .
Then I will move on to . . .
After that I will deal with . . .
And I will conclude with . . .

Giving your agenda (less formal)

First, I'd like to do x/I'm going to do/First, I'll be looking at X.
Then we'll be looking at Y/Then, we'll focus on Y.
And finally we'll have a look at Z/Finally, I'm going to take you through Z.
So, let's begin by looking at X.

Giving your agenda (informal)

So this is what I am going to talk about . . .

. . . and the main focus will be on . . .
. . . and what I think, well what I hope, you will find interesting is . . .
I'm NOT going to cover P and Q, I'm just going to . . .

Giving your agenda (more dynamic)

This is what I'm planning to cover.
I've chosen to focus on X because I think
it has massive implications for . . .
it is an area that has been really neglected . . .
I'm hoping to get some ideas from you on how to . . .
that what we've found is really interesting
I think we have found a
radically new solution for . . .
truly innovative approach to . . .
novel way to ..
We are excited about our results because this is the first time research has shown that . . .
Why is X is so important? Well, in this presentation I am going to give you three good reasons . . .
What do we know about Y? Well, actually a lot more/less than you might think. Today I hope to prove to you that . . .

Referring to handout

I've prepared a handout on this, which I will give you at the end - so there's no need to take notes.
Details can also be found on our website. The URL is on the handout.

17.2 Transitions

Moving on to the main body of the presentation

Okay, so let me start by looking at . . .
So first I'd like to give you a bit of background.
So why did we undertake this research? Well, . . .
So what were our main objectives? Well, . . .

Introducing a new element or topic

With regard to x . . .
As far as x is concerned . . .
Regarding x . . .

Signaling that the topic is about to change

Before I give you some more detailed statistics and my overall conclusions, I am just going to show you how our results can be generalized to a wider scenario.

In a few minutes I am going to tell you about X and Y, which I hope should explain why we did this research in the first place. But first I want to talk to you about . . .

Showing where you are in the original agenda

Okay so this is where we are ..
This is what we've looked at so far.
So, we're now on page 10 of the handout.

Referring to previous topic to introduce next topic

Before moving on to Z, I'd just like to reiterate what I said about Y.
Okay, so that's all I wanted to say about X and Y. Now let's look at Z.
Having considered X, let's go on and look at Y.
Not only have we experienced success with X, but also with Y.
We've focused on X, equally important is Y.
You remember that I said X was used for Y [*go back to relevant slide*], well now we're going to see how it can be used for Z.

Getting the audience interested in the next topic

Did you know that you can do X with Y? You didn't, well in the next section of this presentation I'll be telling you how.

Direct transition

Let me now move onto the question of . . .
This brings me to my next point . . .
Next I would like to examine . . .
Now we're going to look at Z. // Now I'd like to show you Z. // Now I'd like to talk about Z.
Okay, let's move on to Z.
Now we are going to do X. X will help you to do Y.

17.3 Emphasizing, qualifying, giving examples

Emphasizing a point

I must emphasize that ..
What I want to highlight is . . .
At this point I would like to stress that . . .
What I would really like you to focus on here is . . .
These are the main points to remember:
The main argument in favor of/against this is ..
The fact is that . . .
This is a particularly important point.
This is worth remembering because . . .
You may not be aware of this but . . .

Communicating value and benefits

So, the key benefit is. . .
One of the main advantages is. . .
What this means is that . . .
We are sure that this will lead to increased . . .
What I would like you to notice here is . . .
What I like about this is . . .
The great thing about this is . . .

Expressing surprise in order to gain interest

To our surprise, we found that . . .
We were surprised to find that . . .
An unexpected result was . . .
Interestingly, we discovered that . . .

Qualifying what you are saying

Broadly speaking, we can say that . . .
In most cases/In general this is true.
In very general terms . . .
With certain exceptions, this can be seen as . . .
For the most part, people are inclined to think that . . .
Here is a broad outline of . . .

Qualifying what you have just said

Having said that . . .
Nevertheless, despite this . . .
But in reality . . .
Actually . . .
In fact . . .

Giving explanations

As a result of . . . Due to the fact that . . . Thanks to . . .
This problem goes back to . . .
The thing is that . . .
On the grounds that . . .

Giving examples

Let's say I have . . . and I just want to . . .
Imagine that you . . .
You'll see that this is very similar to . . .
I've got an example of this here . . . *show slide*
I've brought an example of this with me . . . *show object*
There are many ways to do this, for example/for instance you can . . .
There are several examples of this, such as . . .

17.4 Diagrams

Making initial reference to the diagram

Here you can see . . .
I have included this chart because . . .
This is a detail from the previous figure . . .
This should give you a clearer picture of . . .
This diagram illustrates . . .

Explaining what you have done to simplify a diagram

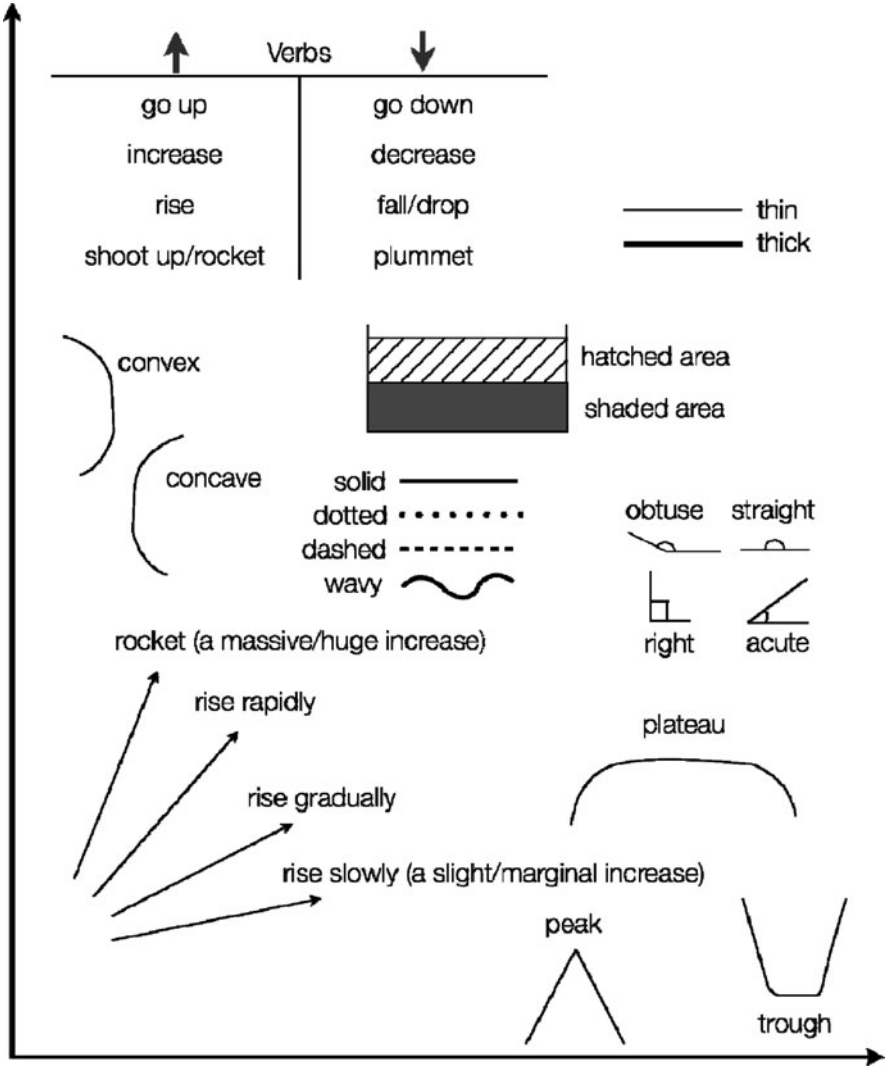
For ease of presentation, I have only included essential information.
For the sake of simplicity, I have reduced all the numbers to whole numbers.
This is an extremely simplified view of the situation, but it is enough to illustrate that . . .
In reality this table should also include other factors, but for the sake of simplicity I have just chosen these two key points.
This is obviously not an exact/accurate picture of the real situation, but it should give you an idea of . . .
I have left a lot of detail out, but in any case this should help you to . . .
if you are interested you can find more information on this in my paper.

Indicating what part of the diagram you want them to focus on

Basically what I want to highlight is . . .
I really just want you to focus on . . .
You can ignore/Don't worry about this part here.
This diagram is rather complex, but the only thing I want you to notice is . . .

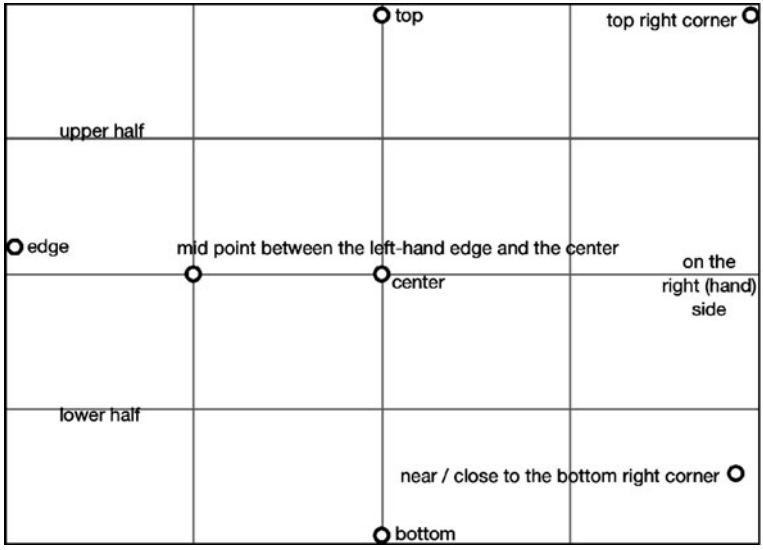
Explaining the lines, curves, arrows

On the x axis is . . . On the y axis we have . . .
I chose these values for the axes because . . .
In this diagram, double circles mean that . . . whereas black circles mean . . . dashed lines mean . . . continuous lines mean . . .
Time is represented by a dotted line.
Dashed lines correspond to . . . whereas zig-zag lines mean . . .
The thin dashed gray line indicates that . . .
These dotted curves are supposed to represent . . .
The solid curve is . . .
These horizontal arrows indicate . . .
There is a slight/gradual/sharp decrease in . . .
The curve rises rapidly, then reaches a peak, and then forms a plateau.
As you can see, this wavy curve has a series of peaks and troughs.



Explaining positions

on the left is . . . on the left side here . . .
in the middle . . .
here, at the top . . .
down in this section . . .
over here is a . . .
the upper/lower section . . .



17.5 Making reference to parts of the presentation

Referring forward

I'm going to do X, Y, and Z.
I'm not going to cover this aspect now, I'm just going to . . .
I'll go into a bit of detail for each concept.
I'll explain this in a moment/I'll talk about that later.
As we will see later . . .

Referring backward

As I said before . . .
Remember I said that . . .
The concept I mentioned earlier . . .
As I mentioned a moment ago . . .
To return to my earlier point . . .
If we go back to this slide . . . (*shows an earlier slide*)

Referring to current slide

Here you can see . . .
Notice that it has . . .
As you can see . . .

17.6 Discussing results, conclusions, future work

Very strong affirmations (but see Section 14.4)

These results definitely prove that . . .

We are convinced that our results show that . . .
What these results prove is . . .

Tentative affirmations

Our results would seem to show that . . .
What these findings seem to highlight is . . .
I think that these results may indicate that . . .
It seems probable from these results that . . .
I think it is reasonable to assume that . . .
Under the hypothesis that x = y, what these results probably mean is . . .
We are assuming that the reason for this discrepancy is . . .
We are presuming that this nonagreement is due to . . .
This may indicate that . . .
A possible explanation is . . .
I believe this is due to . . .

Future work

So, we've still got quite a long way to go. What we need to do now is . . .
Given these results, it seems to us that the best thing to do now is . . .
A promising area for future research would probably be . . .
What we are planning to do next is . . .

Eliciting audience help

To be honest, we are not exactly sure what these results may implicate . . .
We think our results show that x = y, and we were rather hoping to find other people who may be doing similar research to confirm this for us . . .
We are not really sure why the results appear to be so contradictory, and we were wondering whether someone here might be able to help us out with this.
We are actually looking for partners in this project, so if anybody is interested, please let us know.

17.7 Ending

Warning audience that presentation is near the end

Okay, we're very close to the end now, but there are just a couple of important things that I still want to tell you.

Final summary

Well that brings me to the end of the presentation. So, just to recap . . .

Telling the audience where they can find further information

I am afraid that I don't have time to go into this in any further detail. But you can find more information about it on this website (which is on the back page of your handout).

If you would like more information on this, then please feel free to email me. My address is on the back page of the handout./My address is in the congress notes.

Thanking the audience

Thanks very much for coming.
Thank you for your attention.

17.8 Questions and answers

Beginning a Q&A session

Does anyone have any questions on this?
I'd be really interested in hearing your questions on this.
[If no one asks as a question] One question I am often asked is . . .

Referring to level of English just before Q&A session

If you ask any questions I would be grateful if you could ask them slowly and clearly, as
- my English is a bit rusty
- many attendees here today are not native speakers of English

Handling the session

Okay, could we start with the question from the gentleman/lady at the back. Yes, you.
[*Interrupting someone*] Sorry, first could we just hear from this woman/man at the front.
Do you mind just repeating the question because I don't think the people at the back heard you.
I think we have time for just one more question.
Okay, I am afraid our time is up, but if anyone is interested in asking more questions I'll be in the bar and at the social dinner tonight.

What to say when you don't understand a question from the audience

Sorry, could you repeat the question more slowly please?
Sorry, could you speak up please?
Sorry, I didn't hear the first/last part of your question.
Sorry, I still don't understand—would you mind asking me the question again in the break?
Sorry, but to answer that question would take rather too long, however you can find the explanation on my web pages or in my paper.
I'm not exactly clear what your question is.

Going back to the presentation after taking questions mid presentation

Okay, would you mind if I moved on now, because I've still got a couple of things I wanted to say?

Interpreting the questions

If I'm not wrong, I think what you are asking is . . .
Can I just be sure that I understand? You are asking me if . . .
So what you are saying is . . .
So your question is . . .

Avoiding difficult questions

I'm not familiar with the details regarding that question.
I can't give you an exact answer on that, I am afraid.
That's a very interesting question and my answer is simply I really don't know!
That's a good question and I wish I had a ready answer , but I am afraid I don't.
You know, I've never been asked that question before and to be honest I really wouldn't know how to answer it.
I would not like to comment on that.
I am sorry but I am not in a position to comment on that.
I am not sure there really is a right or wrong answer to that. What I personally believe is . . .

Asking for time or deferring

I think it would be best if my colleague answered that question for you.
Can I get back to you on that one?
Could we talk about that over a drink?
I need to think about that question. Do you think we could discuss it in the bar?
You've raised a really important point, so important that I think I would rather have a bit of time to think about the best answer. So if you give me your email address at the end, I'll get back to you.
At the moment I don't have all the facts I need to answer that question, but if you email me I can get back to you.
Offhand, I can't answer that question but if you . . .

Commenting on audience questions

I know exactly what you mean but the thing is . . .
I take your point but in my experience I have found that . . .
You're quite right and it is something that I am actually working on now.
I'm glad you raised that point, in fact one of my colleagues will be able to answer that for you.
Yes, the additional experiments you suggest would be very useful. Maybe we could talk about them over lunch.

Suggesting that Q & A session can continue at the bar

Does anyone fancy going for a drink? because it would be very helpful to have your feedback.
Would anyone like to go for a drink? because I'd be really interested to hear your views on this.

17.9 Things that can go wrong

Equipment doesn't work

I think the bulb must have gone on the projector. Could someone please bring me a replacement? In the meantime let me write on the whiteboard what I wanted to say about . . .

The microphone/mike doesn't seem to be working. Can everyone hear me at the back?

I don't know what has happened to my laptop but the program seems to have crashed. Please bear with me while I reboot.

Okay, it looks as if I will have to continue my presentation without the slides. Let me just look at my notes a second.

You realize that a slide contains a mistake

You know what, there's a mistake here, it should be . . .

Sorry this figure should be 100 not 1,000.

Your mobile phone rings and you have to turn it off

I'm really sorry about that. I thought I had switched it off.

You forget where you are in the presentation

Sorry, what was I saying?

Where were we up to? Can anyone remind me?

Sorry I've lost track of what I was saying.

Sorry, I seem to have forgotten what I was saying.

If you are about to go over your allocated time

It looks as if we are running out of time. Would it be okay if I continued for another 10 minutes?

If any of you have to leave straight away, I quite understand.

I am really sorry about this. But in any case, you can find the conclusions in the handout.

I will put a copy of the presentation on our website.

17.10 Posters

Getting the person interested

Hi, would you like some more information?

Would you like me to take you through the process?

I have a short demo here if you would like to look at it.

Would you like to hear some more details on the methodology?

Offering further help

Would you like a copy of this handout/brochure/document? It basically says the same as the poster but in a lot more detail.

Here is my paper, if you would like a copy.
You can find more details on my website, which is written on my card here.

Asking questions about the person's research

May I ask what field you are in?
Where are you based?
How long have you been working in this field?

Opening up possibilities for further contact

Would you like to give me your email address?
Are you giving a presentation yourself?
Are you going to be at the dinner tonight?
Might you be interested in setting up a collaboration?

Saying goodbye

Thank you very much.
It was very nice to meet you.
Hope to see you around.
Hope to see you again.
I'll email you the website/my paper/the documentation.
Let's keep in touch.
Goodbye.

For good websites on the art of creating posters see page 163.

Links and References

Introduction

Tips for trainers. An interesting experience of getting undergraduates to give presentations can be found at

http://www.aimath.org/mathcommunity/studenttalks.pdf

Tips for oral presentations that are read directly by the author of the paper:

www.cgu.edu/pages/864.asp
www.easternct.edu/smithlibrary/library1/presentations.htm

Tips on creating posters:

searchworks.stanford.edu/view/6287189
www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm
www.flickr.com/groups/368476@N21/pool/
www.easternct.edu/smithlibrary/library1/presentations.htm#posters
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/presentations_poster.html
www.asp.org/education/howto_onPosters.html

Part I: Preparation and Practice

The quotation was kindly provided by Jeffrey Jacobi and can be found in his book: Jacobi J, (2006) How to say it ® - Persuasive Presentations, Prentice Hall Press, New York (see his website at: jacobipersuasivespeaking.com)

Chapter 2

The 20% redundant word statistic comes from my personal observations.

A. Wallwork, *English for Presentations at International Conferences*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6591-2, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

2.1 There are many agencies that edit and revise scientific documentation. The first agency below is my own. The other two are agencies that my clients have also used and found to be very professional.

englishforacademics.com (English for Academics, Europe)
oleng.com.au (OnLine English, Australia)
sfedit.net (San Francisco Edit, US)

In any case, you can find a more complete list of agencies by doing an Internet search with the key words "scientific editing." Note that there is considerable variation in prices among agencies, and within the same agency the prices depend not only on the length but also how quickly you want your document revised. The price will also be affected by the currency (dollars, euros, sterling, etc.).

Chapter 3

3.2 Good online dictionaries with audio are

http://m-w.com/ (The Merriam-Webster dictionary US English)
www.howjsay.com (a British and American English pronunciation dictionary)

3.16 Jeffrey J, (2006) How to say it ® - Persuasive Presentations, Prentice Hall Press, New York (see his website at: jacobipersuasivespeaking.com)

Chapter 4

Tips on how to relax: www.mindtools.com

Chapter 5

The quotation about 90% nervousness was kindly provided by Andrew Mallett of Present Action (present-action.com).

5.3 Statistic from my own data based on scripts of presentations taken from my own students and a sample of presentations from ted.com.

Part II: What to Write on the Slides

The quotation was kindly provided by Professor Trevor Hassall and Professor John Joyce of Sheffield Hallam University in the UK.

Chapter 6

6.3 The original quotation from The Record can be found at http://news.therecord.com/article/354044)

Chapter 7

7.15 The full quotation can be found at hrlr.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/5/1/57.

Chapter 8

8.1 For more on the dangers of PowerPoint type applications see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_By_Powerpoint

Chapter 9

The statistics come from a variety of sources and are quoted in Wallwork A (1999) Business Options, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK

For more on the visual aspect of slides see www.garrreynolds.com/Presentation/slides.html

9.2 The statistic derives from my personal observations.

9.9, **9.10** Information about persuasive power of fonts, and website colors, taken from Goldstein NJ, Martin JS, Cialdini RB (2007) Yes! 50 secrets from the science of persuasion, Profile Books, London

9.11–9.14 Please note that the data presented in the figures should not be seen as scientifically accurate, though I do believe that they reflect reality to some extent.

The figures were created by Michele Barbera of Net7 (netseven.it).

For more details on describing statistics, plus an example of a presentation in action see http://sixminutes.dlugan.com (type in "presenting data" in the search window, and then you will be able to see and read an analysis of a wonderful presentation on ted.com given by medical doctor and researcher, Hans Rosling).

Chapter 10

Shay McConnon kindly gave me permission to quote from his book: McConnon S (2005) Presenting with power, How to Books Ltd, UK

10.3 The statistic comes from Milo, FO (1994) How to get your point across in 30 seconds - or less, Corgi Books, London

10.9 Gladwell M (2008) Outliers, Penguin Books, London

10.10 The first two quotations come from emails to me from Professor Chandler Davis and Professor Martin Chalfie. Thomas Gilovich kindly gave me permission to quote from his book, Gilovich T (1991) How We Know It Isn't So - The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life, The Free Press, New York

Part III: What to Say and Do at Each Stage of the Presentation

Quotation from an email to me from Osmo Pekonen, Finnish author and mathematician.

Chapter 11

11.4 The statistics are based on the following quotation: "Every day 20,000 new scientific papers are produced (Peters, Hohensee: 1996, 129)" in Austermül F, Between Babel and Bytes - The Discipline of Translation in the Information Age, http://areas.iued.uni-heidelberg.de/artikel/Band16_2.pdf . My statistics are not supposed to be entirely accurate (and the first and last are totally imaginary!) but just serve to show how the same statistic can be presented in many different ways.

11.7 Professor Maria Skyllas-Kazacos kindly gave me permission to use this quote. The quotation was originally in an interview with her: www.science.org.au/scientists/msk.htm

11.10 Bjørn Lomborg kindly gave me permission to use this quote. His complete presentation, which is well worth watching, can be found at ted.com/talks/lang/eng/bjorn_lomborg_sets_global_priorities.html

Chapter 13

The statistic that your audience will only absorb about 20% of the information you give them was kindly provided by Andrew Mallett of present-action.com

Chapter 14

The statistic that any audience will forget more than 75% of what they hear within 24 hours comes from Wallwork A (1999) Business Options, Oxford University Press, Oxford

14.8 The first quotation is from New Scientist (December 16, 2009). The second quotation was kindly provided by Ben Goldacre and is from his fascinating book

on “Dodgy Science”: Goldacre B (2008) Bad Science, Harper Collins, London. See also videos on Goldacre’s website: www.badscience.net

Chapter 15

15.5 The statistic is based on my personal observation of hundreds of presentations.

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I would welcome comments on improving this book. I also hold short intensive courses for PhD students and researchers on how to write and present their research.

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